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THE PALACE OF DANGER

MABEL WAGNALLS

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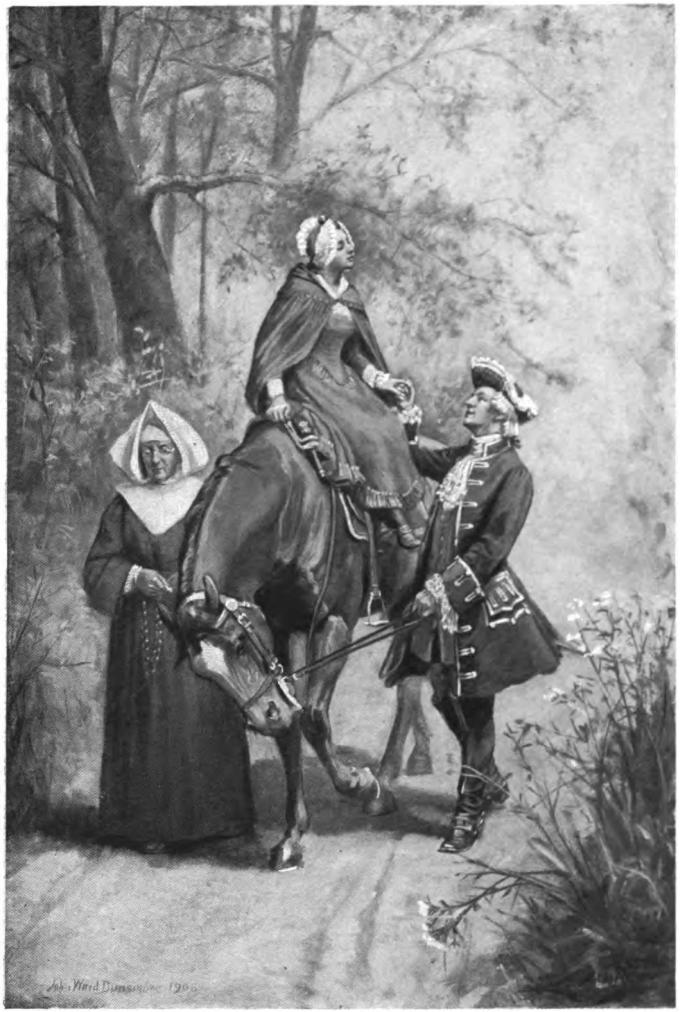

THEY WALKED ALONG AT EITHER SIDE OF THE HORSE—THE BLACK-ROBED NUN AND MAGNIFICENT CAVALIER.

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New York and London
1902

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THE

PALACE OF DANGER

A STORY OF LA POMPADOUR

By

MABEL WAGNALLS

Author of "Stars of the Opera,"
"Miserère," etc.

Illustrated by

JOHN WARD DUNSMORE

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

New York and London

1908

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In accordance with a liberty which Horace Walpole, John Morley and others have occasionally used when writing about Madame de Pompadour, the prefix "de" of her name has been freely dispensed with in the present story. The briefer form falls more rhythmically into the rapid action of fiction.

M. W.

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Chapter I

"BENEDICITE"

VERSAILLES was beginning to shake itself awake; to unfold its working tentacles. The chimney-sweep, begrimed and black, emerged with his broom and ladder; the goat-herd, piping his three-note tune, came driving his flock before him; the charcoal-vender's noisy cart could be heard far down the street; the *blanchisseuse* with her basket of clothes was starting toward the river.

A fluttering yellow paper, crudely printed and hastily tacked upon a wall in the Rue St. Martin, attracted the attention of these early bread-winners. A crowd gradually collected before it; a curious, grinning, chuckling crowd, for any new poster of the street was likely to be worth the reading, and sure to contain some sort of gibe aimed at the Court or the King.

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This one, though less vicious than some, was not without its point. It began with the date, elaborately worded:

"In this year of our Blessed Lord,
Seventeen hundred and fifty six,"

Then:

"The birth of Jesus made
At Court a stir indeed,
And Louis in his coach drove off
To Pompadour with speed.
Said he, 'The child we'll go and see,'
Said she, 'No, not at all,
They'd better bring the child to me,
I never make a call.'"

All this in the Rue St. Martin, mind you, in the very heart of Versailles, and at no great distance from the gates of Louis' palace; which only shows how bold they were becoming — these anonymous rhymesters and the people who read them.

The yellow patch upon the wall continued to amuse every passer-by. One daring youth, with sudden inspiration, scribbled an extra couplet:

"'Besides,' she added, with a sigh,
'The Society of Jesus,
I am sure will never please us!'"

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This play upon the Pompadour's well-known hatred of the Jesuits, otherwise called the "Society of Jesus," was received with hearty guffaws by all who followed the author's daring pencil.

Each newcomer had some comment to make.

"Ha! — a new paper pill for the Poissonière to swallow!" — "A sharp little bone for her to choke on!" They called her the Poissonière (Fishwife) because her maiden name was Poisson (Fish).

But at Court she was the "Grande Marquise," bowed to by dukes and ladies; her favour more sought than the Queen's. Louis' Favourite was a power in the realm. Had not Voltaire himself very gravely affirmed that, as a good citizen of France, he felt bound to pay deference to Madame de Pompadour!

But the Parisian populace and provincial peasants held themselves free to make light of her name, to jeer at her common birth, and to hiss and groan when they saw her drive past in her royal coach with four horses.

"The hussy! She by rights should go in an ox-cart or the tumbrel!" exclaimed a red-faced dame with a strident voice, who shook her muscu-

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lar fist at the Pompadour's name as she read the writing on the wall: "With a pretty face she fished for a rich husband, with a rich husband she fished for the King, with the King she now fishes for a Kingdom — la — la." This last because Pompadour of late was dipping her finger in world politics; stirring up treaties with Austria and such like.

Another onlooker, his trade revealed by a leather-stained apron and some waxed black threads hung around his neck, quietly observed that the rhyme would make a good song. He promptly puckered his unshaven lips and whistled a tune that admirably fitted the words. Then this merry cobbler meandered away, singing the refrain as he went; his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his blouse; his coarse patins kicking up the dust of the King's highway.

Later in the day the groups that gathered before the yellow print were more varied. Lacqueys from the palace, merchants from Paris, gentlemen on horseback, ladies in sedan chairs, all paused at sight of the flaunting verse, and either read it themselves or had their attendants repeat it to them. Even friars, devout of mien, were not

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above revealing carnal curiosity as they passed.

About the time when the sun makes the shadows short, a young horseman approached at a leisurely pace; his head courageously poised; a defiant angle to his gold-laced hat, and a pleasant smile on his lips. From his costume, his bearing, and the direction he came, it was plain he belonged to the palace. There was something attractive in the ease of his manner as he guided his finely caparisoned horse.

On seeing the conspicuous screed he halted, then carelessly reached from his saddle and pinned the fluttering sheet smooth with the point of his sword. But his brow suddenly clouded and his lips became tense with anger when he discovered that Madame Pompadour was the subject of the jest. He slipped his sword under the paper and with one quick movement tore it from its tacking and threw it to the winds. Then he clanked his sword loudly into its sheath and rode on out of the town toward the woods of Bouviers.

Young, handsome, impetuous, the recent incident was typical of his nature. He was one who laughed where others only smiled, who bowed where others gave a nod, who drew his sword

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where others shrugged a shoulder. His arched brows suggested hauteur, his indented chin bespoke the lover, his eyes — ah well — it is enough to say they could do their own work and more. He was rich, he was titled, alone in the world and free to do as he pleased; what more could one wish at five and twenty?

As he presently rode into the forest, his spirit was perceptibly soothed by the mellow effect of the shadow after the highway's yellow glare.

Dismissing the scurrilous verse from his thoughts, he gave himself up to enjoyment of the peaceful October day. An occasional falling nut, a scurrying squirrel in the thicket, a snapping twig, a flitting bird, were the only sounds aside from the gentle creak of his saddle and the hoofbeats of his high-stepping horse. The smell of autumn was in the air; dead leaves and damp mosses warmed over with sunbeams.

The rider inhaled a deep breath, noting as he often had before the contrast of his feelings in the open woodlands with those he laboured under when bowing and posing before the King in the requirements of his position as "Introducteur des Ambassadeurs."

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"You feel the same, too, don't you, Sancho?" he said to his horse. "It's easier walking outside of Versailles than in it."

Not that his duties were in any sense weighty; they consisted merely in presenting the foreign ambassadors every Tuesday at the King's levee, and making formal announcement at the royal dinner when all the expected guests were present.

He had spent most of his life in the palace, having served when a child as page to the Queen. A pretty boy in pretty clothes—slashed doublet, silken hose and fluttering ribbons—his sole duty at that time being to wait each day at the foot of her Majesty's stairs and make one elaborate courtesy when she passed on her way to chapel.

A sugar-coated, candy-coloured existence! He realised this at times and often felt a restless desire to encounter other phases of life than those encompassed within the gilded circle of Versailles.

But these longings, such as they were, did not much disturb the tenor of his thoughts today as he rode on through the woods. Memories and hopes, altogether pleasant, found expression in an occasional smile that flitted over his face.

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At a turn in the road some distance away he saw two women approaching.

"Walk slower, Sancho," he admonished his horse, "lest we frighten those 'babes in the woods.'"

They were a gentle-faced nun and a bright-eyed girl, neither one of whom had yet seen him, for the nun looked down and the girl looked up; her eyes roaming here, there, and everywhere except straight ahead.

The older woman moved along sedate and drear as an autumn shadow, but the maiden, lithe of form and graceful, continually swayed and turned, now to catch in her palm a leaf in its circling flight, now to observe some strange bit of lichen, or again, to pick up one of the glossy horse-chestnuts that pebbled the path.

Suddenly, as though impelled by the exhilarating freedom of the forest, the young girl began to sing. Her tones were of thrilling sweetness, and her song was an "Ave Maria," with sonorous Latin words astonishing to hear from the lips of one so young.

But the song was soon ended, for the nun spoke up, firmly:

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"Hush, hush, Destine! Have I not often told you it is unbecoming to sing out-of-doors, even though it be in the wildwoods? The good God would have given you feathers and wings had he meant you to sing in the forest."

At this she glanced up and then added in lower tones:

"Unlucky girl! See what has happened! A cavalier is coming this way and he must surely have heard you. Lower your eyes with some show of modesty, and come off the roadway. Let us enter this thicket to avoid him."

She held back the bushes for the girl to pass through, while the observing young horseman watched with amusement the two disappear like a pair of frightened pheasants.

"Scared, Sancho! in spite of all!" he exclaimed to his horse, lightly smoothing its mane with the tip of his whip. Then he relapsed again into thought and supposed the incident closed. But it happened that when Destine was told to lower her eyes, she at that moment chanced to raise them (such is the perversity of femininity!), and found the cavalier so much nearer and so much handsomer than she had expected that a strangely

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disturbing bewilderment possessed her. Unmindful where she stepped, she blindly pushed on into the forest thickness.

But the wildwoods, it would seem, are no more intended for young maids to walk in than to sing in. Barely a moment had passed before Destine stumbled into — what the forest-creatures had been wise enough to keep out of. A clicking sound, a tight clasp of her foot, a sharp pain, all at once, caused her to fall with a terrified cry, while briars and stones added viciously to her distress.

With Sister Therese's help she arose, but renewed pain in her foot brought forth another involuntary cry.

"Santa Maria! It's some gamekeeper's trap you've stepped into!" exclaimed the good Sister, quickly kneeling to examine it. "Only be patient," she added, "till I release your poor foot."

She began to pull and press at the vicious iron teeth, which would surely have lacerated the girl's slender ankle had it not been for the stout leather boots that she wore. But the iron was rusty and not easy to unfasten. Sister Therese redoubled her efforts, and with something like

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terror began to realise that it was all of no avail.

"A la grâce de Dieu! What is to be done?" she questioned, excitedly, while Destine, with tears in her eyes, was bravely trying to bear the pain.

At this moment fate sent the rescuing Knight in the form of our young cavalier, who, having heard the first startled cry, had alighted from his horse and pushed his way through the underbrush. How often the evil we flee from eventually looms up as a blessing! So at least thought Sister Therese who was this time most heartily glad to see the stranger approaching.

He perceived at a glance the cause of the trouble.

"Ah! — an iron shoe that's too tight!" he exclaimed, as with one strong pressure of his gauntleted hand he released the imprisoned foot. At relief from the steady pain, a timid smile stole over Destine's face, and she thanked him, her eyes still moist.

He noted how her long, curved lashes clung together like the petals of a half-drowned rose, and he mentally decided that the most witching expression on a woman's face is that rare combi-

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nation of tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips.

Sister Therese was not remiss in courteous expressions of gratitude but, never unmindful of her charge and the lurking danger of an exchange of words with a comely gallant, she pleaded no further need to detain him and directed Destine to follow her.

With courtly grace he parted the bushes for the nun to pass through to the roadway; then for Destine. She limped as she stepped, and at once he gave her the support of his arm.

With a startled glance of tremulous wonder, she looked up — and then down, for her eyes had met his, which were dark, lustrous, and long accustomed to such encounters unabashed.

He observed with admiration the quick-changing colour of her curving cheek, but he little dreamed that his face seemed to her like that of the angel Gabriel. Nor could he know that the touch of his jewelled hand and the soft perfume of his lace jabôt affected her like the great crescendo of the organ on Easter-day.

Arrived at the highroad, and regardless of Sister Therese's discipline, he proposed that Destine should ride.

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"You will only harm yourself by trying to walk, Mademoiselle; you must make use of my horse for the rest of your way."

Accustomed to having his advice followed, without further ado he lightly lifted Destine into the saddle.

"I will walk alongside," he said; "you need have no fear. Tell me your destination."

Sister Therese, convinced that the situation was beyond her control, meekly mentioned the convent of Saint Cyr; whereupon the little party proceeded. Destine, somewhat terrified at the splendid steed she was mounted upon, was none the less pleased to stay there, especially when the stranger took her hand in his, the better to hold her in place. He observed her wrist as he did this:

"You have cut yourself, Mademoiselle, on a stone."

At once he drew from his coat a lace-bordered handkerchief and bound it securely around the wound.

"Oh — how I thank you," timidly murmured Destine.

He inquired compassionately about the injured

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foot and made sure that she was comfortably seated.

"So I am escorting one of the demoiselles of St. Cyr!" he remarked interestedly, "the establishment made famous by Madame de Maintenon."

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Destine, "her portrait hangs in our entrance hall."

The young courtier was wondering just what version of this lady's life the nuns imparted to their pupils.

"St. Cyr, I am told, gives the best of teaching," (this with a complimentary nod to Sister Therese) "and 'tis held an honour, I know, to be admitted, but alas, it implies too that Mademoiselle is an orphan?"

"Yes, Monsieur," was the gentle reply, "since my twelfth year."

"And since then you have lived at St. Cyr?"

"Yes."

"Permit me to say, Mademoiselle, that France owes much to Madame de Maintenon if, by her bounty, St. Cyr harbours many singers like you!"

A quick glance from Sister Therese to her charge plainly implied: "I told you so."

Our young gallant now turned toward the nun

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and asked with charming deference, yet mingled too with nonchalance (for the Sister's troubled looks disturbed him not at all), "Do you not think as my reward for rescuing this young forest-bird (she surely belongs to the forest — with her chestnut hair and hazel eyes!)" — he looked up at Destine as he said this, and smiled, — then resumed his remark to the nun, "do you not think she should finish for me the song she began not long since?"

Sister Therese hastened to put the recent *faux-pas*, as she deemed it, in as respectable a light as possible by explaining that Destine's motive had been merely to practice her solo for the vesper service.

"But it was unmannerly to do so," she added, "and I promptly chided her for it. I fear you will think her very rude."

"Yes," was the calm reply, "if she does not sing for me now!" The smile which accompanied this speech had a warmth and gentleness that melted even Sister Therese.

"Sing, child, since you are so requested."

They walked along at either side of the horse — the black-robed nun and magnificent cavalier —

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while Destine, like bright-eyed Morn between Night and Day, rode radiant with the glow of a new, strange joy.

Without hesitation or fear, she lifted her voice and sang,

"Benedicite, omnia opera Domini!"

The psalmist's mighty meaning was transmuted in the singing to a simple song of gladness. Every word was edged with a clarion-ring of youthful hope and brightness. Her tones pealed out through the forest like strokes from a silver bell.

The nobleman at her side, the one who inspired her song, was lost to himself as he listened, and quite forgot that all the time he was firmly holding her hand. He came back to earth, however, when the horse gave a stumble, and the song suddenly ended in a dainty little shriek followed by a bubble of laughter at this ludicrous *coda* to the music. He joined in the laugh, it was so infectious, and so did Sister Therese, and then — somehow — all at once they became well acquainted. Even Sister Therese talked freely now.

But this agreeable state was soon ended, for the walls of St. Cyr arose darkly before them, like Duty overshadowing Pleasure. The hands were

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unclasped, the stirrup let down and — in a moment — all was over. A few words were spoken (Destine could never recall what they were); then followed a flourish of whip, a dashing of hoofs, a galloping down the highway. Once the stranger looked back and gallantly waved his tri-corne hat, his last adieu, and also, if the truth be told, the last thought he was likely ever to bestow upon the singing maid of St. Cyr; for it happened that he was at this time heart-full of another woman.

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Chapter II

AN EMBROIDERED WEB OF FATE

DESTINE, much distraught and pensive, performed that day's dole of work and lessons until, the vesper service over and the evening meal concluded, she was free to take her accustomed candle from the bench in the arched stone corridor, and mount the broad stairway to her solitary sleeping room, small, bare and white.

Her steps somewhat quickened as she neared this little sanctum, but, once inside, her haste disappeared, borne away on the wings of a happy sigh. She closed the door slowly by leaning against it. An expression of dreamy gladness rested upon her face, which the candle, still in her hand, illumined like an enshrined Madonna.

At last she could let her thoughts fly, her imagination soar, her memory stretch itself. No teasing girls, no reproving nuns, no impending lessons to interfere.

She closed her eyes for a moment and pictured

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it all again; the morning's amazing adventure; her Friend of the Forest, his words, his glance. How like to a fairy-tale! An unknown Knight had rescued her from the iron jaws of Death!

She sighed again in a sort of delicious tragic rapture, and glided across the room with the air of an imprisoned princess, depositing with stately grace her candle upon the prie-dieu at her bedside.

Then she stepped to the window, started to draw together the clean, starched muslin curtains, but pausing dreamily, gave herself up to the luxury of further visioning. With pensive gaze she studied the deep black shadows under the trees, and tried to imagine she saw him there; that he had come back and was lingering around in hopes of seeing her face at a window! Of course she knew that he would not; "but wouldn't it be nice if he would!" This is indeed the entire thin-threaded woof upon which a maiden's fancy weaves all its gorgeous patterns.

Slowly and reluctantly Destine drew the curtains into place, then, seating herself upon the low bed, she began to undo her hair. There was no looking-glass in which to admire the effect of fluffy curls coiling about her shoulders, but the

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mirror of memory seemed to serve the same purpose, causing her fondly to finger a curl as she recalled his words about her "chestnut hair." She was again lost in thought; in a delightful glow of luminous imaginings.

But suddenly mindful that Sister Therese would disapprove of such musings, Destine resolutely opened a little book of "Meditations," and began to read the lesson for the day.

"October 17th. — Throughout this month of fading verdure, this season of falling leaves, we should note the flight of years; be conscious of the waning-time of life, and meditate upon the approach of death. Life is a ladder, by which we either mount to Heaven or descend to Hell. . . . ."

There was a suggestion in this last sentence that started her thoughts to spinning anew.

Ladders! Elopements! — She had read of such things. Perhaps — ! Suppose — ! She unconsciously held her breath, half expecting to hear the tap of a pebble at her window.

She heard, instead, the tap of the chapel-bell, and jumped like a startled child. It was the half-hour stroke, and a signal to prepare for bed.

Smiling at her fright, and dismissing her thoughts, Destine proceeded to disrobe.

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First the white kerchief was removed from her neck, spread out on her lap and carefully folded in its plainly-marked creases. Then the waist of her gown was unbuttoned, its loose sleeves permitting it to fall unhindered from her sloping shoulders and firm, round arms. She looked down at her wrist, then exclaimed with dismay:

"His handkerchief!"

There it undoubtedly was; a bit of rare lace still securely tied where he had placed it.

Her bare arms and shoulders as well as her face suddenly became mantled with a glow of colour as she was seized with a sense of mortification because she had failed to return what did not belong to her. What would he think, after all his kindness? If only she could send it back to him!

Perhaps she would meet him again some day! This thought implanted a glad bit of hope in her heart. Her first great chagrin gave way to a feeling of pleasure that she had in her keeping something belonging to him.

Slowly and carefully she unloosed the dainty souvenir. It was perfumed with the odour of sandalwood; a fragrance that enwrapped Destine again in the memory of that magical moment

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when the stranger's arm had supported her, and his voice, so close to her ear, had addressed her with tender solicitude. The handkerchief became very dear to her. She held it close-clasped in her hands, pressed it to her breast, to her lips, and then, not knowing why or wherefore, buried her face in her pillow and wept the unbidden tears of her heart's first May-time.

Soon she dried her eyes and examined the kerchief more carefully; felt of the exquisite lace and admired its pattern. Then to her great joy she found in one corner some embroidered letters: "de V- r- i- e," — his name! And above was a crown. He was titled! A nobleman of high estate!

With sparkling eyes and heart beating fast, she counted the points on the crown, enumerating them aloud as though plucking the petals of a daisy.

"One, two, three—that's a chevalier! Four, five—baron; six, seven—a count! He is a count! Think of being rescued by a count!"

Destine was almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of this thought. She looked again at the name, tossing a curl back from her eyes as she spelled it over, "de V-r-i-e — the Count de Vrie."

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She could think of him now by his name; she alone in St. Cyr!

She became suddenly thoughtful as the question arose: should she tell Sister Therese? After some deliberation, she decided not to do so. Having no way by which to return the handkerchief to its owner, she would keep it as her most precious possession.

She carefully tied up the little token of her dream with a piece of blue ribbon and then cast about in her mind where best to conceal it. The hope uppermost in her heart was that she might again meet the stranger, and in that case, she must have it ready to return. So she planned a way to carry the treasured memento always with her.

At that moment someone knocked at her door and a gentle voice admonished: "Bed-time! Lights out!" Destine hastily extinguished her candle and kneeling at the prie-dieu repeated the oft-said Aves of her rosary.

A wan, dim light from a clouded moon drifted through the curtains and lent a gentle glory to the room. All was silent, save the slight sound of swaying beads and an occasional sibilant from the moving lips.

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At last the sacred number was complete, but Destine did not rise at once. Instead, there was a moment's pause, then in tender, timid tones she uttered aloud a venturesome addition:

"God bless the Count de Vrie — and — bring him again to me."

Long, happy thoughts hovered about her pillow, as with hand under cheek and drooping lids, she lay for a long time awake. Her fancy pictured when and how she might encounter her hero again. She imagined him walking into the chapel some day during vesper service while she might be singing her solo; she hoped it would be the "Laudes Domini" which carried her voice so high. She would like to astonish him with her singing. Perhaps some day when she worked in the garden he might chance to be passing outside the convent walls. She decided always to sing at her work. Or perhaps she would meet him when again she went with Sister Therese through the woods; she was sorry the Sister had forbidden her to sing out-of-doors. After all, the hope most enticing was that she might see him in the chapel. A recurrent smile, that had been flitting over the dreamy-eyed face on the pillow, settled down there

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to stay as the heavy lashes drooped lower and finally rested on the curving cheek still flushed with the warmth of happy thoughts.

Every day thereafter, during the vesper service Destine looked for a stranger; someone who wore a velvet coat and a lace jabôt. But the weeks went by and only the familiar peasants, day after day, besought God's blessing in the little chapel of St. Cyr. Still she sang "Benedicite!" and still she prayed:

"God bless the Count de Vrie,
—And bring him again to me."

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Chapter III

SPEARED WITH A JEST

AT the foot of the great stairway in the palace of Versailles, there had been erected for Louis' pleasure, at an expense of two million livres, the famous "Théâtre des petits Cabinets."

Wonderful scenes were enacted on this bijou stage where Madame Pompadour, as leading lady and manager of an aristocratic little troupe, displayed extraordinary histrionic powers. Nothing was spared in the way of money and effort to make these private theatricals perfect of their kind. Professional dancers were engaged for ballets, choristers for opera, and experienced musicians for the orchestra.

Besides Madame Pompadour, there were a number of good actors among the amateurs of Versailles. The Duc d'Orleans was most excellent in comedy rôles, and Madame de Brancas proved a capital foil to him, while the charming Madame de Mirapoix could play the ingenue to perfection.

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As the particular qualification of each participant had become evident, he was relegated to one line of characters. In this way it came about that Madame Pompadour's invariable stage-lover was the young Introducteur des Ambassadeurs, the Count Romain de Vrie. Especially fitted for Romeo-rôles by his appearance, he added to that qualification a splendid intensity in acting. In such plays as "Les Surprises de l'Amour," "Cléopâtre," "Venus et Adonis," and "Le Méchant," he revealed such an amount of youthful ardour as to make one quite forget stage and footlights.

The audiences were always very limited; Louis himself selecting every guest. Sometimes the Queen and her suite were present, but more often only the King and his special favourites witnessed these exquisitely mounted and carefully prepared performances.

Louis did not always applaud what he saw. There were those who doubted whether his Majesty derived two million livres worth of pleasure from watching Madame Pompadour respond to the passionate love-making of the handsome Count de Vrie. This doubt was augmented when the King,

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after witnessing an exceedingly realistic portrayal of "Venus et Adonis," suddenly declared himself tired of theatricals. Thereafter they were discontinued.

Romain, light-hearted and unthinking, never noted the gathering cloud on the august brow, for Louis artfully concealed his displeasure. Those who knew best understood, however, that this was the most ominous sign of all. The Introducteur des Ambassadeurs was still treated by Louis as his most valued servitor. Romain was thus blinded to his doom, which, in spite of a maiden's prayer at St. Cyr, was rapidly rushing upon him.

The last performance in the Théâtre des petits Cabinets occurred December the first. The following Tuesday Louis edified the Court with a little play of his own devising, and for weeks thereafter it was told in Versailles how the Count de Vrie was given his "lettre-de-cachet."

It was immediately after the morning reception of ambassadors. Many attendants still remained in the audience room, but the Introducteur's duties being over, Romain was bowing his departure from the royal Presence, when Louis made an astonishingly playful and personal remark.

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"Au revoir, De Vrie: do not be late to dinner tonight."

As neither De Vrie nor any other attendant was ever known to be late when on duty at the King's dinner, the Count could only take this as a special mark of *bon-camaraderie.*

Louis' sinister purpose was made clear, however, when Romain encountered, outside the reception room door, a page, who, with a punctilious bow, handed him a letter and said:

"From his Majesty."

Officers of the Guard and attendant lacqueys stationed on the grand stairway saw the Count break open the seal and hastily read the missive. At the mere touch of the paper a premonition of its contents swept over him like an icy wave. An instinct like second sight caused certain words to flash through his brain even before his eyes perceived them: "exile," "immediate," "permanent." It needed no second glance for him to realise the crushing truth.

Immediately another thought rose uppermost—the consciousness of being observed. He resolved that by no slightest sign should his agitation be revealed. Long practice in the art of adjusting

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his manner and speech to the forms of etiquette enabled him now to master himself.

Never a muscle of his face gave way. The smile with which he had emerged from the Presence was still on his lips as he addressed the bearer of the letter:

"Pray request his Majesty not to await me this evening at dinner."

Then the Count de Vrie, royal Introducteur des Ambassadeurs, magnificent in his costume of grey satin with crimson linings, trimmings of gold and ruffles of lace, proceeded down the great stairway. The steady clack of his heel on each step was unbroken in its regularity, and he acknowledged with accustomed grace the salute of the soldiers guarding the grand portal.

Without once relaxing the tension in which he had left the palace, Romain, accompanied by his equerry, hurried on to the apartment which he maintained in Versailles.

But once inside his own abode his pent-up feelings burst forth in explosive utterances and vehement gestures.

He hurled his hat into the farthest corner, exclaiming savagely: "Blast his soul!" He

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flung down his gloves with an oath, and threw aside his mantle with another.

"Perdition take you!" he cried out fiercely, as he seized from the table a miniature of the King and dashed it to the floor in a frenzy of rage. Then he paced the room, back and forth, with infuriated steps, clenched hands and fiery eyes.

His equerry, unacquainted with the cause, could only stand aside and watch in decorous silence and controlled amazement these violent demonstrations.

Romain suddenly tore from his pocket the royal missive, crushed it in his hand, then tossed the tattered document to his faithful servitor.

"Read that, Lemoyne, then help me to curse the Court and the King!"

Lemoyne was much older than his master and at all times an able counsellor. He soon perceived the purport of the paper, then quietly urged Romain to more caution in his speech.

"Even walls have ears, and disapproving words about the King have a wonderful carrying power."

"Let them carry on the four winds of heaven, — I care not," retorted Romain, far beyond the

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point of caution; "curses are all such a narrow-minded monarch deserves."

"My dear Count," Lemoyne replied placidly, "if a king were broad-minded his crown would not fit. Do not feel so outraged merely because his Majesty has chosen to dispense with your company. Many besides you have been shown the way out of France. And after all, it is no disgrace, for only the exalted are exiled."

To this speech Romain answered hotly:

"It is not the dismissal, but the manner of it, that maddens me. Did you carefully read the order? I am given no time for preparation. I must leave the province today, report at Evreux tonight; no chance even to say farewell to my friends! I am cast out like a clod from a shovel! By all the Saints, it is monstrous! After serving his Royal pleasure all my life, bowing and scraping before him, sweeping the floor of Versailles with the brim of my hat at all hours of the day and night, this is my reward; to be sent away without ceremony; my very going made to serve as a jest. He bade me not to be late to dinner!"

As the memory of this insult bit into his pride, Romain held his arms rigid and tightened his

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lips over set teeth to restrain the passion of resentment that possessed him.

After a momentary pause he added with fierce irony:

"And this is our Sovereign of France! Our most Christian King! — whom we call 'Louis the well-beloved'!"

Again he paced the floor while Lemoyne, at a loss for words, re-read the fateful letter. Before he had finished, Romain was raging aloud as before:

"Oh, I know what it means! I understand his scheme; the sly Bourbon fox! It is all cleverly planned to prevent my seeing the Marquise before I go: Louis will have her under his own eye this afternoon in the royal hunt at Senart."

Lemoyne thoughtfully nodded his head: "I was in fear of this outcome when you told me his Majesty had grown 'tired of theatricals.' One should never 'tire' a King!"

Unmindful of his equerry's comment, Romain continued with spasmodic vehemence:

"But let me tell you, it is one thing — to order, and another — to be obeyed. I intend to defy him!"

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Lemoyne looked aghast: — "Defy the King!"

"I am not going to leave here until I have seen her: I will die first. You need not say a word. I am not going; do you hear? *I am not going!*"

He emphasised the last words by pounding with his hand upon the table: a heavy silver tankard was upset and fell with a great clangour to the floor.

"You may as well dig your own grave and jump in," solemnly warned Lemoyne: but he spoke to deaf ears.

Romain, unbuckling his sword, noisily threw it aside; then continued in the same strain:

"I tell you my mind is made up. I intend to see her though the firmament falls! I shall get her to go away with me! That is the kind of game I'll toss up with the King!"

Having delivered himself of this ultimatum, Romain hastily poured some wine from a decanter, and tossed down a glassful.

Lemoyne in the meantime stepped quietly nearer and began, gently but firmly, to lay before his master the gravity of the situation, and the folly of his plans.

"You forget that to evade an order of banishment means death. There is no alternative for

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you but to go, and go at once. Before sundown today you must be seen at the province frontier started on your journey. The King's order reads plainly."

At these words of restraint, unreasoning fury swept over Romain. He turned upon Lemoyne violently:

"Oppose me! — that's right! Side with the King: you might run some risk if you did not! Bid me go like a whipped schoolboy! Call me a fool and a maniac! Shove the 'tumbling wall,' — that's the world's way! But I had not thought it of you!"

He grasped Lemoyne roughly by the shoulders; but suddenly his impulse relaxed from fury into friendship. The hands that were laid on Lemoyne's broad shoulders rested there for a moment with the tenderness of appeal.

"Forgive me, Lemoyne," — the young Count spoke huskily.—"Forgive me, I don't seem to know what I say. I was wrong; you are right; I must go."

He sank into a chair and leaned his head and arms on a table. A sigh very akin to a sob shook his frame as he moaned:

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"You don't know, you never can know, what it means to me."

A species of torpor succeeded the turmoil. He did not move for some time. Lemoyne, deeply sympathetic but always discreet, spoke no word, but busied himself with preparations for the sudden departure. There was much to be done: orders to be given; papers to be sorted; some to be signed. These Lemoyne placed before his master, who mechanically wrote his name in silence. But suddenly he stopped, laid down his pen, pushed back the papers, and announced calmly, firmly, almost joyously, as though it were a new suggestion:

"I am not going, Lemoyne."

The equerry could scarcely believe he had heard correctly.

"Not going?"

"No. I've thought it all out, Lemoyne, — but there is no time to lose; I must hurry to Vrieonne."

Vrieonne was the Count's ancestral estate. Lemoyne questioned deliberately:

"Do you actually intend to allow the frontier guardsmen to report tonight that no one answering

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to the description of the banished Count de Vrie has passed that way?"

There was a ring of boyish animation in Romain's voice as he hurriedly answered:

"Au contraire; they shall report that someone exactly answering to my description has been passported through."

Lemoyne almost lost patience.

"This is no time to joke; tell me, au nom de Dieu, what do you mean?"

"I mean — *Pierre Nicod!* I am going to send him in my place. It's strange I did not think of him before; but we must make haste; — pull the bell-rope; order the horses. Quick, there, give me my riding-boots. No time to lose!"

But Lemoyne could not enter into the spirit of this activity. He was thoroughly appalled at the latest proposal.

"Is it possible you contemplate sending a common stable-lad in your place?"

"Pierre is not a common stable-lad," Romain impressively replied, as he stamped a boot into place. "He is a very *un*-common one, for he looks enough like me to be my own father's son. He may be, for all I know! You have probably

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often thought so yourself, though you will not admit it! At least you must concede that he looks like me?"

"Yes — somewhat."

"Somewhat! Isn't his nose exactly like mine?"

"Yes."

"And his forehead?"

Lemoyne again reluctantly answered in the affirmative.

"And his chin?"

"Yes, perhaps, if it were shaved."

"And his mouth?"

"Yes, when it is closed."

"You cannot deny then that his profile is astonishingly patrician and like my own. Eh bien! I intend to send that profile, for a few days at least, on this journey of exile — René, saddle the horses."

He spoke these last words to a footman who appeared in answer to his ring.

When the servant had gone, Lemoyne undertook as energetically as before to dissuade his master.

"But, my dear Count, Pierre's resemblance to you is not so striking as you think."

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"Yes, it is," Romain interrupted, "he dressed in my clothes once when we were boys and fooled all the servants, until he opened his silly mouth."

"And that is what he will do again," protested Lemoyne earnestly. "You cannot keep his mouth tight shut."

"Yes, I can: money will open any door or shut any mouth."

Romain, all aglow with hope, was pulling on his gauntlets.

"But listen, I beg of you," the equerry continued, "think a little, plan a little."

"I have thought, and I have planned," promptly retorted Romain. "He shall cross the frontier tonight in my stead, and his appearance will amply agree with the description the gendarmes will have of me. Within two days I expect to join him with the Marquise, and shall then resume my identity. Voilà tout! It is simple enough, but you must go with him."

Lemoyne gasped.

"I — go with him!"

"Certainly! — to do all the talking. Come, Lemoyne, you do not intend to refuse?"

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"I shall never refuse to do anything for you, but I shall always give advice, and I now urge you most earnestly against anything so hazardous. To disobey the King's order is madness. Do not do it, I entreat you."

With equal earnestness Romain made reply, as he grasped his equerry's hand.

"And I, on my part, entreat you, my dear Lemoyne, as a friend, to accord with my plan."

There was never a time since his childhood that he had not been able to win Lemoyne over to any plan he devised, when he resorted to this tone of personal entreaty. And now, as the older man contemplated the figure before him — the eager dark eyes, the confident boyish pose of the head, the half-smiling, half-pleading expression of the handsome, clear-cut mouth — he was suddenly engulfed by endearing memories of his young master's earlier days. The spirit of the boy shone through the face of the man; the servant's eyes filled with a sudden mist of tears. After all, he thought, youthful impulse sometimes carries one over obstacles that sober judgement would leave untried. So, as usual, Lemoyne yielded to the boy's will — always the wind's will.

"Do as you like. I follow."

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"Ah! that sounds like the Lemoyne of old days!" exclaimed Romain; a flush of joy on his face.

The equerry smiled. "You think advice is good, but accord is better! Eh bien, there is plenty of work before us. We must not make any miscalculations. He who leaps a chasm dare not go half-way! Are the horses below?"

Romain had stepped to the window.

"Yes."

"Then we must not lose a minute. It'll take violent riding to reach Vrieonne in time."

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Chapter IV

A PERILOUS IMPERSONATION

VRIEONNE lay some leagues to the North near Marly-le-Roi, and in the absence of the Count, only a few attendants remained in charge.

The tall stone gateway had not been opened for weeks when Romain and Lemoyne galloped up to the porter's lodge; their bridles dropping foam, their boots mud-spattered and their horses breathing hard.

They pounded loudly on the postern, causing consternation within the lodge, where the porter and his wife were enjoying a peaceful game of loto. The letters were scattered and a footstool upset as the worthy couple excitedly pushed back their chairs and hastened to peer through the little curtained window of the lodge.

"Holy Madonna! — it is Monsieur le Comte!"

The porter rushed out, while his good wife, hastily seizing a clean apron which she endeav-

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oured to tie over the one that she wore, stationed herself in the doorway to join in the welcome, her hands busily occupied with a confusion of strings at her back.

A moment later the great gates were slowly wheeled open by the bustling attendant; a thin little man, possessed of a tongue that swung on an easy hinge, and a voice that suggested a rusty one.

"It is such a surprise, Monsieur, and such an honour, to have you come so unexpected. You will find all in order here, I trust, — all but the peacocks. Ah Monsieur, I have bad news about them; they are dead, every one. I did my best to save them; rubbed grease on their gullets, and dosed them with juniper juice, which is good, they say, in some cases. The birds were all —"

Romain interrupted his voluble gate-keeper:

"Where is Pierre?"

"Pierre? Oh, he is around some place. I was going to say; the birds were thriving —"

"Tell me, quick, where is Pierre?"

"Why — I don't know; with the horses, perhaps."

"Fly, Lemoyne, find him; gallop, whip, spur!"

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Lemoyne was off. Romain rode on to the chateau; the porter following.

"We saved all the feathers," he resumed; the subject of peacocks still uppermost in his talk, while his wife, left behind in the doorway of the lodge, had not yet succeeded in disentangling the strings of her two aprons.

Lemoyne speeded his horse to the stables. No one was there. He called aloud — "Pierre!" — No answer. He dismounted, looked up and down, here and there, in and out of every stall. He rode on to the meadow, then to the exercise-ground. He galloped over to the blacksmith's hut, inquired of passing peasants, looked where the game-traps were set, and hunted in every place where Pierre might be. There was no sign of him anywhere.

When Lemoyne returned to the chateau, he found the Count in a frenzy of suspense. The porter had looked in Pierre's room at the lodge, in the wine-cellar, in the orangery. He now searched every apartment in the chateau.

At last Pierre was found in the armoury. Pierre, it appeared, had entered this mediaeval chamber, with the intention of polishing one of the shields, but at the unlucky moment when

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Romain walked in, the stable-boy was strutting in a suit of armour — that is — as much of it as he had been able to buckle on himself. A helmet of ancestral fame was balanced upon his head, a shield weighed down his arm, and a massive sword flashed heroically in his hand. His corduroys were crumpled under metal greaves of historic value. In this outfit Pierre was parading up and down the long gallery, his head held high with an air of dauntless daring as he gave brave sword-thrusts at imaginary foes.

When the door was thrown open and he beheld his master, poor Pierre was seized with such a spasm of terror that his helmet fell to the floor with a tremendous clatter; his sword dropped from his hand, while the shield, being strapped to his arm, served somewhat for support.

He looked up for the expected reprimand, but to Pierre's amazement, not a word of blame did he hear. On the contrary, it seemed the very sight of him filled the Count with great joy.

"I have found you at last, Pierre, thank Heaven! Come quick, I need you. Get rid of that toggery. Here, Lemoyne, help him off with that iron-work. Bring him to my dressing-room: don't lose a minute."

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Pierre, dazed and astounded, was presently ushered into his master's private room, where he tried to speak, to apologise, to crave forgiveness, to express contrition, but he was told to hold his tongue.

"No time for you to talk," insisted the Count. "Only listen well when I talk. Try to understand what I have to tell you. Lemoyne, begin dressing him at once. Sit down here, Pierre."

Pierre had never sat down in the presence of his master before, and it was well-nigh impossible for him to do so now. Lemoyne finally took him by the shoulder, and forcibly seated him. He then stayed where he was put, having always had a faculty for doing that.

Pierre was a ne'er-do-well sort of fellow, born and brought up on the estate, his mother having died at his birth. The other servants commonly called him "Crève-cœur," a nickname he had acquired because his chief characteristic consisted in persistently shirking hard work by dolefully declaring that it hurt his heart.

He was generally laughed at for this, but he managed to do more loafing than anyone else on the estate.

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As he now sat watching with uncomprehending wonder the extraordinary movements of the Count and Lemoyne, who were hastily collecting a suitable costume and discussing ways and means, it was difficult to trace any resemblance between him and his master. A half-grown beard of sandy shade marred his well-shaped chin. His teeth were irregular and discoloured by tobacco. His hair was red and the general expression of his face when speaking was at variance with the strength of his features.

But he was not dull of intellect and when the Count presently explained very minutely the service desired of him, Pierre quickly grasped the purport of the astounding proposal. He not only understood it, but was delighted beyond bounds at the adventurous prospect of playing the rôle of a Count for two days, to say nothing of the munificent reward he was promised.

Astonishing was the transformation soon effected in Pierre's appearance by means of a change of costume, a clean-shaven face, a powdered wig, a touch of black on his eyebrows, gloves on his hands and a sword at his side. Here was a good enough substitute to deceive any unsuspecting

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official as long as this quasi-count kept his mouth shut. Upon this point he was instructed many times.

"Lemoyne will be with you to do all the talking. See that you never open your mouth!" charged the Count, as he fastened on to the new-made nobleman's breast various orders which betokened his rank and identity.

After some further consultation it was arranged that Lemoyne and his charge should take a circuitous route through the Forest of St. Germain, in order to avoid meeting acquaintances of the Count.

"And even if you should be so unlucky, just ride on and do not speak. Remember, your very life depends on a shut mouth!"

Faint-hearted Crève-cœur was deeply impressed by this admonition of his master, and he promised to obey to the letter.

Scarcely an hour after the plan was unfolded to Pierre, he and Lemoyne rode forth from the castle courtyard, as the shadow on its great sun-dial pointed to the figure three.

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Chapter V

INTO THE LAND OF SILENCE

THE feelings of the two riders differed greatly. Lemoyne had little relish for adventure, and the present undertaking filled him with misgivings. This attempt to put a ploughboy in the place of a patrician, though it be but for a day, was, he knew, insanely hazardous.

After several times observing with scrutinising glance the plumed and perfumed figure riding at his side, he noted with some comfort that the fellow held his head well — the Fates be praised for this! — and he sat upon his horse as though he grew there. But how would he act — ah, here was the hinge mishaps would hang upon! — how would he act if they were forced to stop at an inn? This was an occurrence more to be dreaded than passing the guardsmen at the province frontier.

It was plain to be seen that Pierre was more engrossed in the pleasure of playing the part of a grandee than he was in the serious side of the

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enterprise. Lemoyne, as they cantered along, gave many and careful instructions in the matter of deportment, to forestall the possible contretemps that he feared would come upon them. Pierre always answered with amiable docility, but his peasant brogue was startling to hear, coming as it did from a throat encircled by fine lace and gold chains.

There were frequent intervals, however, when the silence was broken only by the regular beat of their horses' feet: Lemoyne was too troubled to talk, and Pierre was still strongly impressed with the command not to open his mouth.

They kept to the forest as much as possible, though, even so, an occasional meeting with travellers was not to be avoided.

Near Port-Marly they crossed the Seine on a little barge.

While the water-man was poling the barge Lemoyne, leaning against his horse, observed the surrounding peaceful scene; wide vistas of autumnal fields where women gleaners in short-length skirts, pale red, dull green and plaid, lent life and colour to the picture. (The strain of tired muscles and moist brows was lost in the

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perspective.) Far beyond, imbedded on a hillside like pins upon a cushion, gleamed the white-washed cottages of a tiny town. (Their decrepid walls and caving roofs were hid in the haze of the distance.) Near at hand lay the verdant banks of the placid river. The Seine was narrow here, and curved like the blade of a cimeter, with edges carefully sheathed under bending willows and tall, thick grass. Its tranquil, glinting surface shone like polished metal, save where the reflection of a long grey cloud resembled the blur of a breath on a mirror. A scarcely perceptible breeze stirred the silver and green of the willows and languidly waved the purple flag-flowers that rimmed the river's marge.

A silence almost tangible caressed the day and the hour. The only sounds to be heard were the splash and dip of the barge-pole and the persistent cry of one bird — a terrified cry, Lemoyne soon noted. Tracing this wood-note, he saw a meadow-lark fallen into the stream from an overhanging tree. The little creature had a broken wing and was struggling piteously to flap its way to shore. But the fretted feathers could not long bear up, and soon the smiling, peaceful river serenely closed above its victim.

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Over all things shines the sun: under all things yawns the grave.

Lemoyne was saddened by the incident. Pierre, also watching, quietly crossed himself.

"It's bad luck to see a bird in pain," he explained to Lemoyne quite simply: he was abjectly superstitious.

Leaving the river, they skirted the woods of Vesinet; a gloomy spot whose legend Pierre knew well. "The Woods of the Traitor" the place was commonly called, because here the brave knight Roland was assassinated by his follower, Ganelon.

Emerging after a time at another curve of the Seine, they crossed again and then plunged into the forest of St. Germain.

Here Lemoyne felt more secure, for it was a less travelled region than Vesinet. Under the dense shade of sturdy oaks, protecting elms and clean-bodied beech and birch, they hurried on never slacking their pace, though once, at sight of a cross and shrine in the roadway, Pierre wanted to stop and offer an Ave. The little sanctuary marked the spot where, years agone, a man had been murdered by brigands. Lemoyne, not wishing to

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tarry, assured Pierre that it was bad luck to stand where a man had been killed. Pierre was silenced and willing to go on.

Soon they heard at no great distance the well-wielded strokes of an axe, and the air became redolent with the odour of fresh-cut timber and piled-up logs. At a wood-chopper's hut Lemoyne drew rein to inquire about the road. The bronze-faced forest-workers in long, limp, loose-sleeved blouses eyed the riders curiously, especially Pierre — the more magnificent of the two.

"Ciel!" spoke one to his neighbour, "I'd give every finger on my hand to be a great gentleman like that."

Pierre overheard the remark and experienced thereby the proudest moment of his life. Proceeding on their way, he held his head higher than ever and felt himself all but a prince.

Though outwardly calm, Pierre was in fact all athrob with excitement, an inward agitation which had been augmented by the progress of events ever since that first startling moment of being discovered in the armoury. His heart was pounding at his ribs like a crazed prisoner trying to get out. His pulses were tapping a furious tattoo

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that sounded in his ears like pandemonium. He often before had experienced a confusion of noise when his heart took to pumping wildly, but today it seemed a whole orchestra was let loose behind his temples. Now on top of all rang a clear-toned bugle blast. This rather frightened him; it was almost supernatural — this semblance of a distant horn. He vaguely thought of Gabriel's trumpet, and wished he had taken time to cross himself with holy water before venturing forth as a count.

There! it sounded again!

Holy Mother! this was nothing supernatural! It was something a great deal worse! Lemoyne too had heard it. He sharply drew rein and listened, a startled look on his face. There was now the sound of approaching horses, the barking of dogs, shouts of laughter and the merry blasts of a hunting horn. It needed no more to apprise Lemoyne of the appalling fact that the King had changed his plans.

"Heaven help us!" he cried in husky tones. "It's the royal hunting party!"

"Let us get off the road," urged Pierre with quick terror.

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They turned their horses, only to find the huntsmen drawing near from all sides.

"Don't speak! Don't speak!" admonished Lemoyne, wildly. "Even if the King commands you — *don't speak!*"

"The King!" echoed Pierre, an ashen hue spreading over his face as the enormity of his danger loomed upon him. Almost blind with fear he scrambled from his horse with a half-formed idea of climbing a tree.

"Stay where you are," commanded Lemoyne. He reached over and with a violent grasp tried to restrain Pierre from dismounting, but then something caused him to spring from his own horse and rush with new alarm to his companion's aid.

"What has happened to you? What is the matter?" he questioned breathlessly. At that moment he saw, with slow-dawning horror, Pierre clasp his hand to his heart, stagger forward, and fall.

"Pierre! Speak to me!" Lemoyne, leaning down, frantically seized the fallen man and turned him over. His terrified gaze beheld a stone-white face with tightly shut teeth.

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Poor Pierre! No danger now that he would speak! He had changed masters, and the new one, as the old, commanded him to silence. Little had he dreamed, or Lemoyne either, that throughout their journey the Pale Horseman had been riding alongside, reaching for and clutching at Pierre's weak heart — that poor, foolish heart so lately swelling with pride.

Paralysed by the suddenness of Death's rude grasp and the magnitude of danger surging upon him, Lemoyne stood immobile, helpless, dazed.

In the meantime the hunting party had been noisily approaching. Some were galloping, and all were converging from different directions, snapping shrubbery beneath them; horses afoam, high-stepping, with ears back, alert for the horns. Huntsmen in bright trappings and courtiers in glittering costumes, gold-braided and buttoned, broke through the forest like fragments of a splendid sunset.

Every rider drew rein at sight of the recumbent figure in the roadway. Each asked the other:

"What has happened? Who is it?"

Room was soon made for a rider more gorgeous in apparel than the others. He was somewhat

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portly, but of commanding presence, with a face whose too heavy cheeks and chin could yet not conceal the original beauty of his features. His eyes, though large, were no longer clear as they had been when called the most beautiful blue eyes in France. Louis Quinze, who at fifty-four still bestrode his horse in kingly fashion, was much better fitted in figure to wear the royal robes than in spirit to wield the sceptre.

"Keep back the dogs," he commanded, and then, seeing the terrified Lemoyne who all this time could think of no word to speak, rode nearer and looking upon the motionless figure, inquired:

"What is the matter with the Count de Vrie, that he has fallen so low?"

The tinge of hauteur and sarcasm in this remark imparted to Lemoyne a certain indignant courage. His mind, until now in a chaos of dismay, suddenly acted rapidly and clearly. He realised that the King was completely deceived. Hastily unfastening his cloak, Lemoyne laid it gently over the pale, still face, as he replied in broken tones:

"He is dead, your Majesty!"

"Dead?" exclaimed in one voice the King and several others who were near. Many dismounted,

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and all were questioning and talking amid much excitement.

"Was it an accident? Did he fall from his horse?"

Lemoyne's explanation, "A sudden weakness of the heart," was quickly carried from ear to ear. Those beyond the King's hearing went deeper into the matter.

"His Majesty gave him his congé this morning," said the Count de Beringhen, First Master of the Horse, flicking a fallen leaf from his saddle-cloth as he spoke.

"And as I happen to know, the bolt was aimed at his heart," responded the Marquis de Livry, Second Master of the Horse.

"Aye," smiled de Beringhen, "and the shot hit true! Poor De Vrie! Ah — here comes Madame la Marquise at a full gallop. Let us press forward: there will be a scène-de-théâtre now, mark my word, more worth the seeing than any at the Petits Cabinets!"

The ladies for the most part were behind in the chase, having taken more interest in their appearance and their coquetries than in the hunt. For this reason they were last in the group to arrive.

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Madame Pompadour's spectacular approach was made way for. All eyes were upon her as she accomplished with consummate skill an abrupt halt.

It was her appearance on horseback that first had won the King's admiration. Her skill as a rider was ever a subject for eulogistic phrases. "Nymph of the Forest," and "Diana of the Chase," were appellations frequently applied to her.

Today she was gowned in green velvet. Her jaunty three-cornered riding hat, edged with white maraboot feathers, surmounted a wonderful powdered coiffure. Her face and figure were of a beauty more spirituelle than sensuous and her blue eyes, although not large, were noticeably expressive. She conveyed an impression of crisp vitality; every movement and glance radiating animation.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Something surprising? — exciting? — an accident? — What is it?"

She spoke with all of a Frenchwoman's grace and gestures, her voice having peculiar charm.

Madame du Hausset, her *dame d'honneur*, who had come somewhat earlier upon the scene, was

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the first to enlighten her. At the name "De Vrie," and the news of his death, a pallor spread over her face and she bit her lips nervously.

The King, being near and noting the effect upon her, took some pains to probe her emotions further, the suddenness of the situation having placed her at considerable disadvantage. "It is an occurrence strangely timed. The Count has journeyed further than our decree of banishment implied."

Madame Pompadour, still too surprised to dissimulate, quickly exclaimed:

"Was he banished? I had not heard."

Louis arched his brow with significant meaning, as he asked with pointed suavity:

"Are you greatly surprised, Madame?"

But by this time the Marquise was herself again and, with a graceful inclination of her head, gave answer:

"Surprised, perhaps, but in no wise doubting your Majesty's good judgement which, in this case, we see, Heaven's verdict has confirmed!"

Her remark somewhat lessened the oppressiveness of the scene, for everyone had felt the King's mood to be unfavourable. He presently turned to

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"WHAT IS THE MATTER?" SHE ASKED.

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Lemoyne and asked further details of the "Count's" death, while others of the party were busy directing the construction of a rude bier upon which to carry the body back to the chateau.

Seeing that the King's attention was elsewhere, Madame Pompadour resolutely descended from her horse and stepped over to the silent form now resting upon a bed of leaves.

"Is he surely dead?" she asked. "There are sometimes mistakes."

She gave these sentences by way of explanation to those who observed her as she stooped over and partly uncovered the dead features.

A puzzled expression was soon revealed on her face, for her keen eyes detected — a *difference*. She looked up excitedly, but caught the agonised, appealing glance of Lemoyne, who had watched her movements in terror, a fact which accounted for the distracted and disjointed answers he had been giving to the King's questions. But that one glance was enough to enlighten the Marquise.

She understood.

With trembling hands she covered again the face which she knew was not that of the Count de Vrie.

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She grew cold at the realisation of what Romain had done, and felt faint as she thought of the possible consequences. Her emotion revealed itself by tightened lips and quick-coming breath. Noting the surprised expression of those around her, she hastened to say something about always being "unnerved by the sight of death."

Whereupon one of the courtiers poured a cordial from his hunting-flask into a small cup, and handed it to the Marquise. At this moment the King addressed her:

"Your grief, Madame, is manifest. We condole with you upon the loss of so dear a friend."

It was a perillous moment for the Favourite. The silence that waited for her rejoinder was so intense that the keepers afterward declared the very dogs ceased to pull at their leash.

De Beringhen glanced at De Livry with a knowing look; this was a "scène-de-théâtre," indeed, worth hearing.

Madame Pompadour slowly raised her eyes to the King and looked directly at him; a glow of colour suffusing her ever-fascinating face as she replied in quiet, steady tones:

"I have lost no special friend, Sire! This gentle-

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man here was no more to me — than that!" and, with a quick toss, she emptied the contents of her wine-glass upon the unknowing figure at her feet.

It was an act that startled her beholders, at the same time dispelling the tensity of feeling about her. All could see that the King's displeasure had lifted. He devoutly crossed himself, being at all times superstitious though in no wise given to religion, and declared:

"You are rash to challenge the dead, Madame; they are the only ones to whom I bow."

The foresters had by this time laid the body upon some interwoven branches. Under Lemoyne's direction they started with their burden toward the wood-chopper's cabin where he hoped to engage a wagon that could carry Pierre — dead but still masquerading — back to the Chateau Vrieonne.

In the meantime the hunting party uncovered their heads and silently watched the procession until it was out of sight.

Then all eyes were turned upon the King, who moodily announced:

"I have no further pleasure in sport. We will return to Versailles."

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Madame Pompadour was assisted to her horse, and a page held the King's hunter as he mounted. The cavalcade started from the scene less noisily than it had approached, and with no attempt at order or precedence, for the King waived ceremony when in the forest.

He rode alongside the Marquise, somewhat apart from the others, absorbed in a gloom peculiar to his temperament.

"A long journey the Count takes today," he remarked as though thinking aloud. "Each one of us in turn must travel that road alone, — absolutely alone. Therein lies the terror!"

"A King should never travel alone: with your Majesty's permission, I promise to go with you when the final summons comes."

The Pompadour spoke with effective seriousness. She was sincere in a certain sense, but above all, she was dramatic; any thrilling speech that came to her lips soon prompted in her heart the requisite emotion.

Her sympathetic response to his mood might have lightened the King's gloom, had it not happened that at this point a graveyard chanced to come within the line of his vision. They had

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emerged from the forest, and at no great distance lay one of the numerous, desolate, fast-crumbling villages that graced Louis' realm. On a hill above it, like a crown on a corpse, was the stone-studded burying ground: the graveyard had grown, while the town stood still.

"Yonder," pointed the King, "is one of the Silent Cities whose population never was known to decrease."

He reined in his horse and summoned his Grand Falconer, Madame Pompadour's nephew, the Duc de-la-Vallière-de-la-Baume-le-Blanc. Louis made short work of this name:

"Vallière!" he called, "ride over to that burying ground and see for me whether there are any graves newly dug."

Promptly obeying the royal order, the Grand Falconer soon returned and reported the discovery of three open graves.

"Ah!" sighed the King, sinking himself in the gruesome idea, "then there is one for each of us, Madame: you and me — and — De Vrie!"

Pompadour gave a little shiver at these words. After a moment's pause, she most solemnly announced:

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"You bring death so near that I fear for my soul. I am going to yonder chapel to pray."

The King interposed an objection.

"They are holding a service there now: you will be recognised; the congregation disturbed."

"Ça ne fait rien," was the determined rejoinder: "I will cover my habit with Madame du Hausset's cloak."

She did so, the King looking on; somewhat surprised at the turn of affairs his own conversation had occasioned but at the same time interested.

"Will you not come with me?" he was presently asked as the Pompadour headed her horse toward the chapel.

"Oh, of course," he exclaimed, gallantly enough. "Where you go — all follow. But I, too, need a cloak to conceal my identity."

Pompadour smiled daringly.

"Only kneel down and pray, Sire, then no one will dream it is Louis Quinze!"

The King allowed this to pass, and accepting his Grand Falconer's cape, rode on with the Marquise.

Leaving the horses with the grooms at the gate, they walked past the graveyard and entered the little chapel of St. Cyr.

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Unannounced and unknown, they attracted no particular attention; a circumstance which must ever be a surprise and a source of wonder to royalty. The stolid peasants kneeling at their beads scarcely noticed the entrance of a gentleman and lady in *costume-de-chasse*.

Madame Pompadour, with preëminent instinct for effect, bowed her form and head upon a prie-dieu that was in line with the light from a stained-glass window. A shaft of gold merged into red illumined her head and hands. The King observed and admired.

There was little else to attract him in this unpretentious place of prayer. The power of simplicity, the grace of humility and the force of sincerity were attributes he never perceived. He was conscious only of the chilly atmosphere in the vaulted nave, the dripping candles, the tinsel Madonna, the unpleasant paintings of miserable martyrs, the rigid statues of sorrowing saints. He detested the droning voice of the priest at the altar and the dull chanting of the choir at the right, enclosed and half-concealed by a grim, penitential grille. The smell of the swinging censer sickened him. He wished he had remained

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outside, and was on the point of leaving, when something caused him to look up. Madame Pompadour, too, raised her head.

The prosaic intoning of the choir had been broken in upon by a solo; a proceeding most unusual in the church-service of that time but adopted in this little chapel — simply because a God-given voice was harboured there, and the nuns and novitiates, the choir boys and acolytes, and the old Abbé himself all praised God the better for hearing it.

Today, in starting, the tones somewhat wavered, like the first flight of a bird, but soon they were soaring, free, glad, resounding, and seemed to fill the dim chancel with light. Not even the heavy meaning of the words, nor the solemn cadence of the music, could weigh down the scintillating brightness of that voice. It carried its own message of joy.

Madame Pompadour, thoroughly appreciative of the beautiful in every art, felt interested at once in the singer and desired to commend her. As a means of doing this she gave a gold-piece for charity to the door-keeper, after the service was over, and told him to fetch the young soloist.

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Others of the hunting party had strayed into the church by this time, so when Destine and the Mother Superior came forward they found a score or more of high-heeled nobility at the door.

To say that no one had been impressed and interested when the King and Madame Pompadour entered the chapel, would not be correct. Here, at last, was a "velvet coat" and a "gold-trimmed hat!" To be sure, the wearer was not the one whom Destine had been looking for, but the presence of any sort of nobleman in St. Cyr was agitating to one who had secretly been praying for just such an event.

From her place in the choir, Destine had been able to see through the open door others of the party who had remained outside. She believed the Count de Vrie was among them. He had brought his friends with him! When she received the summons to go forward, no possible doubt remained in her mind. She was glad she had his handkerchief with her, ready to return to him.

When the elegant lady at the door presently spoke to her, praised her singing, asked her name, very disconcerted answers were given.

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Madame Pompadour could not but be amused at the girl's evident interest in all that was going on, for her bright eager eyes wandered back and forth, surveying every member of the party.

Destine very reluctantly realised that her Knight of the Forest was not among the number, but she still was unable to disassociate him in her mind from the present extraordinary visitation. It seemed to her that she ought not to lose this opportunity of making some endeavour to return that valuable handkerchief.

While the Mother Superior was talking to the other ladies Destine made bold to ask a question, after first making a proper courtesy, and begging the "gracious lady's" permission.

"Certainly, ma petite, what is it?"

"I wondered —," Destine blushed and hesitated, "I wondered if Madame perhaps is acquainted with the Count de Vrie?"

No name under heaven, spoken by Destine, could have caused the Marquise more astonishment.

The King standing near gave a low laugh, unusual for him, and blandly observed:

"Madame, you see, it is impossible today to escape from the Count de Vrie!"

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The Pompadour frowned. She was not only surprised, but displeased, to hear that name from the lips of this girl. But she dared not show any great interest or curiosity in the presence of the King. The situation annoyed her, and she brusquely turned from Destine with the brief words:

"The Count de Vrie died today, Mademoiselle."

The rest of the party followed Madame Pompadour from the chapel, leaving Destine, to the Mother Superior's amazement, strangely unhappy.

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Chapter VI

AN EVENT AT ST. CYR

NOW why in the name of good St. Cyr had that pious young Miss, with her mouth full of prayers, inquired about the Count de Vrie?

The Pompadour asked herself this many times, and wondered not a little.

A discordant note has always the effect of sounding the loudest and longest, and so with this question: it lingered in Pompadour's memory with strange and irritant persistence. Like a bat in a barn it lodged in her brain, flapped around, nested there, disturbing her dormant curiosity until this was thoroughly aroused.

She was worried, too, about the outcome of De Vrie's disastrous undertaking. What on earth could he mean? Had he lost all reason? She had not heard from him, and did not know what he might do next.

In a very short time she was all on edge, indignant and angry; her bourgeois blood was up.

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She was furious because of the hazardous situation she had encountered in the Forest of St. Germain. It would take her some time to forget that uncomfortable half-hour when she barely had saved herself from the King's displeasure.

Romain's love had become altogether too troublesome!

She had taken his love as a matter of course. That she had encouraged him in it, must also be taken as a matter of course; a splendid coquette and a handsome adorer — the rest goes without saying. But she had never dreamed that his ardour would lead him into the amazing folly of perpetrating a masquerade trick on the King!

She could not but admire Romain's daring, even while she was vexed, but she was genuinely alarmed as well.

Where could he be? She knew he was alive. If his identity should be discovered, Heaven help him! — and the Pompadour, too! One stroke of Louis' pen, one wave of his hand, one word from his lips — and she would be as though she were not! The palaces that knew her would know her no more!

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She shivered at the thought.

If only she could hear from Romain; communicate with him: she would certainly impress him forcibly with the fact that he had imperilled her as well as himself by so madly defying the King.

Thus her thoughts shaped themselves until, ever and again, that hateful question clawed and scratched up all her smoothed-over resolutions.

Why in the name of the Holy Virgin had that demure, down-glancing young creature enquired about the Count de Vrie?

And where was he hiding himself?

The suspense was making her sick. Four days had passed.

Sainted Martyrs! What if this whole king-slipping game had been devised for love of another woman!

It was a thought that lent quite a new colour to Pompadour's flaming indignation.

Perhaps the whole solution of the mystery rested in the keeping of that peachy, half-ripe, unplucked —

Thousand Thunders! — but this was a matter she soon would settle!

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The Marquise violently jerked the bell-rope at her side (she was still in bed; it was not yet noon) and summoned Madame du Hausset; fired by a sudden resolve. She would learn what that girl knew about him — would use all her woman's wit to harrow every secret from her soul.

When the *dame d'honneur* appeared she was told to go at once to St. Cyr.

"There is a young girl — I can't recall her name, but you will easily find her; sings solos in the chapel, has a voice like an angel, a face like a Fra Angelico, and talks like a fool. Bring her here. Say that I wish her to sing for me."

And so it happened that day, as the pupils and teachers of St. Cyr were rising from their mid-day meal, in the large dismal dining-hall, a great clatter of horses and wheels, and jingle of silver trappings were heard in the courtyard below. There was an irresistible rush of white-aproned, demurely-coiffed maidens to the dining-hall windows, whence they saw a dazzling sight; a superb coach all blue and silver, white horses with flowing manes, footmen in velvet livery, coachmen with powdered hair.

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An elegant lady within the coach was speaking to the gate-keeper, who presently assisted her out of the vehicle and into the doorway of the reception-hall.

Many "*Oh!'s*," and "*Ah!'s*," and "*Voyez!'s*" escaped from the lips of the young heads at the windows, but these were mild compared with the exclamations that were heard when Sister Therese entered the room later and announced that Destine de Varel was to make ready at once for a visit to the Chateau of Bellevue, where lived Madame la Marquise de Pompadour.

That Destine was of late the favoured of fate every girl in St. Cyr had been forced to admit. Her encounter with the cavalier as related by Sister Therese had filled their young hearts with envy enough, and the incident of the chapel had been more than they could stand. They had mutually agreed to protect Destine from the danger of overweening conceit by a practiced indifference to both herself and her voice. But when Success goes beyond a certain indefinable line, Jealousy, heretofore standing aloof, suddenly changes front and rushes forward with open arms, glad to be recognised even as a bowing acquaintance.

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The invitation to Bellevue placed Destine beyond the pale of envy; though she was too astonished and excited by the news to notice the sudden warmth of her young companions. Some followed her to her room and crowded in to help her dress, while others stood at the door and in the corridor, all talking, exclaiming, gesticulating, wondering, admiring, questioning.

"You will tell me everything that you see, won't you, Destine?" spoke Fanchon, who had not addressed her for a week.

"And if they have you sing, do give them the 'Laudes Domini.' It is my favourite, you know, and your voice sounds so beautiful in it." Adrienne was pinning into place an unruly lock of Destine's hair as she spoke.

"Perhaps you will see the King!"

They all heaved a little gasp of wonder.

"Or the Queen!"

Destine doubted this, laughed nervously, and declared it was all "as exciting as a First Communion!" Sister Therese was somewhat shocked, knowing well there was little in common between a First Communion and a visit to the Pompadour. But she knew also that the simile only suggested

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itself because Destine was donning her simple communion gown of soft white silk, ever since reserved for great occasions. It seemed to Sister Therese symbolical and appropriate, for she vaguely felt that the girl might need its protecting influence.

It may be wondered that consent was so readily granted to this unlooked-for invitation from the "Painted Sepulchre of Versailles" — a term frequently applied by the populace to the abode of Madame Pompadour. But whatever they thought, the fact remained that an invitation from the royal Favourite was paramount to a command, and furthermore, Madame Pompadour, always seeking to follow in the footsteps of her distinguished predecessor, Madame de Maintenon, had time and again emptied her purse into the coffers of St. Cyr. The charities of the Marquise were at all times munificent. Accompanying the request for a visit from Mademoiselle de Vârel had come a large donation, which the Mother Superior had no wish to refuse. Madame du Hausset was the bearer of this gift as well as of the invitation.

"Madame de Pompadour was so delighted the other day with your voice," she said to Destine

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when the Mother Superior had introduced them, "that she wishes to hear you sing some of her own compositions."

Destine could not conceal her pleasure and surprise.

"Was the beautiful lady who spoke to me in the chapel the great Marquise?"

The Mother Superior smiled: "I knew it was she, but I did not tell you, for I saw that they all wished to be unknown. But come, Destine, you must not keep Madame du Hausset waiting. Here, let me tie your bonnet."

She kissed the young face as she did this, and said:

"Good-bye, little one; be a good girl, and God bless you!"

Then Destine was helped into the wonderful coach beside the charming "grande dame." The two footmen with a single bound took their places behind, and stood there like statues, while the whip was flourished and the carriage whirled away toward the centre of the universe — Versailles!

To the girls left behind, it seemed as though the sunset gates had opened and Destine was glinting away to the land of gold and glory.

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Chapter VII

A SONG OF FAITH AND A SNEER OF DOUBT

DURING the drive to Bellevue Destine was kept busy replying to a steady stream of questions from Madame du Hausset; a pleasant-faced person with a plump, trim figure, who was possessed of a harmless but persistent curiosity about everybody and everything.

She asked, in a placid, amiable, unbroken monotone, how many years Destine had been at St. Cyr? Was she fond of the nuns? How old was she? Did she remember her parents? — both of them? Where had they lived? Had she no brothers or sisters? Was she not very lonely sometimes? Where were her parents buried? Had her mother been a singer? Was her father fond of music? What had caused his death? Was he sick a long time? Who had brought her to St. Cyr?

These numerous questions tended to embarrass Destine by making her self-conscious, and when-

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ever this happened, her lids had a trick of drooping as if to protect her spirit. They would lift again as soon as she was drawn out of herself; her natural courage then responded, and she could look directly at her inquisitor with a pair of large, thoughtful eyes.

Madame du Hausset became interested in this hide and seek of Shyness and Courage. She did not diminish her questions, but tackled a broader field, inquiring about the convent, the pupils there, and how they occupied their time.

Destine told with animation of the beautiful embroidery they were taught to work, and described the elaborate altar cloths and vestments they made and sold to the cathedrals. Her face lighted up with enthusiasm as she told, further, of the flowers they raised and sent every week to the market at Bouviers.

Presently Madame du Hausset called attention to the view from the carriage window.

"We soon shall see the château; here is the gate-way."

The questions and conversation had so occupied Destine, that she had not been able to enjoy as she would have liked the scenery along the way,

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nor the wonderful experience of riding in this splendid Cinderella coach.

They entered the beautiful park of Bellevue, and could see at a distance the turreted château set high upon an imposing eminence with terraces leading down to the river Seine. The driveway circled round and round the miniature mountain, revealing glimpses of far-away fields, low hills and wooded vales; all seemingly held together by the shining little river which clasped the earth like a silver chain. Toward the east one could plainly see the walls and spires of Paris, and equally distinct in the opposite direction loomed the masonry of Versailles, for Bellevue was half-way between the two.

The splendid lawn-covered spaces of the park were decked with fantastic shrubbery and artificial cascades guarded by unwearied sea-gods, white and ghost-like, perpetually pouring water from jars of polished stone.

Destine, with fascinated gaze, noted the statues of Bacchantes and Satyrs peering from leafy enclosures, while at either side of the drive-way were pillars hung with festoons of growing vines.

At last they approached the magnificent

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chateau, which had been designed and built under the Favourite's personal direction.

When the carriage stopped, two footmen, who apparently had risen out of the earth, were at the door assisting Madame du Hausset and Destine to alight.

Broad marble steps led up to the great entrance doors of Bellevue, which were guarded by Swiss Grenadiers, exactly as at the Palais Royale.

Madame du Hausset passed with Destine through a seemingly endless detour of marble corridors, sentinelled by immobile flunkeys in the Bellevue livery of purple and gold.

After removing their wraps in Madame du Hausset's private apartment, that lady led her protégée to the spacious boudoir of the Marquise who, surrounded by ladies and courtiers of varied rank, was receiving her intimate friends.

Bewildering indeed was the sight to Destine: the sound of many voices and cultivated laughter broken in upon at intervals by Gourbellon, the *valet de chambre*, calling out the names of new arrivals, was confusing and incomprehensible.

Because his voice was the loudest, his figure the tallest, and his costume the brightest, Destine

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at first supposed that Gourbellon must be the King.

Madame du Hausset kindly endeavoured to enlighten her about the various personages who were present.

"The gentleman who has just arrived is Monsieur de Marigny, Madame de Pompadour's brother, and the one to whom she is talking is Dr. Quesnay, her physician."

"Which one is the Marquise?" asked Destine.

"There on the divan, don't you see? — all the others are standing."

The picturesque group clustered about the divan was unreal to Destine and fanciful as a figure-piece of Sèvres porcelain. She looked upon a vision of pink and white ladies in flowered silks, with panniers, patches, and powdered hair; and gentlemen in satin frock-coats who bowed a great deal and made frequent use of lorgnettes. It seemed incongruous that the figures were talking and that she could now and then hear a remark.

"Dr. Quesnay is trembling lest the King should appear!" said the Marquise in jesting tone, dotting her words with dimples; "he is always embarrassed in the presence of his Majesty!"

The famous chirurgeon bowed and promptly replied:

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"Madame, you are right. When I am in the presence of the King I say to myself — here is a man who could order my head from my shoulders!"

("Mon Dieu!" thought Destine. "How terrible!")

The Doctor continued: "And this idea, Madame, embarrasses me!"

"Well, you can carry your head in confidence today, for the King will not be here."

Destine was relieved to hear this.

There were other groups in the room, some small and some large, continually changing with kaleidoscopic effect. A vivacious young woman, all pretty and pink and perfumed, who was talking to Monsieur de Marigny, Madame du Hausset pointed out with the explanation:

"That is Madame de Mirapoix, the wife of our Ambassador to England."

"Is the Ambassador here, too?"

"No, of course not; he is in England: she will not stay with him because the climate spoils her complexion."

In the occasional sentences overheard from a group of gentlemen standing near, the term "Encyclopédie Universelle" was prominent.

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"I will do anything at all to help along the great work; write an article on—dots, anything!" said a small, lean, sardonic-looking man, with eyes like the points of two swords. Destine was about to ask who he was, when Madame du Hausset directed her attention elsewhere.

"Turn around, when you can, and you will see the Prince de Condé; he owns over five hundred snuff boxes."

The Prince was holding one of these boxes in his hand at the moment, having recently offered some of its contents to his companion. The latter, evidently resuming the topic of their conversation, now remarked:

"He was a courtier par excellence, a comrade worth knowing and a connoisseur of many things. He recommended to me the glove-perfumer I now patronise."

The Prince shrugged his shoulders and said: "Poor De Vrie!"

Destine's heart very nearly stopped beating; she held her breath and tried to hear more, but at this moment she was addressed by the Marquise, who had apparently been aware of her presence from the first.

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"Mademoiselle, pray sing for us."

Destine was thunder-struck to find herself made so conspicuous. She blushed and faltered:

"But, Madame, I know nothing except our choir-music."

"Eh, bien!" broke in the hostess, not unkindly, however: "sing of the infant Jesus! — it will be something new."

No one blanched at this bit of blasphemy; it was typical of the times.

Destine hardly heard it; she was too absorbed in the task before her.

"Sing for us that solo I heard in the chapel last week. I remember the theme, and may be able to devise an accompaniment."

The Marquise stepped over to a handsomely decorated clavecin.

Gifted and skilled as a musician, Madame Pompadour with her masterly playing gave support and encouragement to Destine who soon was at ease in the song. Her tones were borne upon the accompaniment like lilies on a lake, and she sang with voice and spirit attuned to the sacred subject. The simplicity of her convent costume, the natural grace of her girlish figure,

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the unconscious earnestness of her expression — all produced a charming picture. Such unadorned beauty in that brocade boudoir was like a woodland blossom in a bonbon box.

"Sweet mignonette in a holy vase!" gallantly exclaimed the Prince de Condé, as he joined in the applause when the music was ended.

Destine remained near the instrument, shrinking from the company clustered about Madame Pompadour. The thin little man with the piercing eyes made his way to the young girl.

"What do you think about, Mademoiselle, when you sing like that?" he asked, abruptly. Destine at first lowered her eyes; then suddenly looked at him frankly and said:

"I think of what I am singing; if the song is a prayer I try to be praying."

"Do you pray, Mademoiselle?"

Nothing could equal the terseness of his questions and manner, but there was something fascinating in his very directness, causing even Destine to be disarmed of self-consciousness. Though usually timid, she was possessed of an innate strength which started up when least expected. It was evident in her present composure as she answered:

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"Yes, Monsieur: do not you?"

"No," was the prompt reply, "I do not believe in either prayer or immortality. But I like to have other people tell me their beliefs. I would like you to tell me why you pray."

Destine, suddenly thrilled with the spirit of the proselyte, at first hesitated, and then answered earnestly, with eyes very bright and cheeks very red:

"Because, Monsieur, I think — it seems to me — safer."

"What do you mean by 'safer,' Mademoiselle?"

This made Destine thoughtful: his questions were so astonishing; but she presently found courage to explain.

"There are threats of eternal punishment if you do *not* pray, but I never heard of such a threat if you *do*."

An amused expression flitted over the usually sneering countenance of her questioner, but he respected her earnestness and her youth too much to have even a tinge of sarcasm in his reply.

"Your logic is good, Mademoiselle, and I would not have you believe otherwise. Hope is the chief charm of youth. If the fledgeling thought of fear as well as of freedom, it would never fly: if the

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rose-bud thought of storm as well as of sunshine, it would never bloom. But do not wonder at me, Mademoiselle; I am a meteor, fallen from heaven to earth, and become a stone, hard to move, hard to soften."

There was a sudden charm in the smile that lightened his impenetrable features as he added:

"Your words have matched your voice, and I shall hope to hear both again. Au revoir."

He kissed her hand, an act of courtesy new to Destine, and then walked away. Madame du Hausset joined her protégée and remarked:

"I am afraid the Mother Superior would reprimand me for permitting so long a tête-à-tête. What was it about? Your cheeks are like roses!"

Destine was still following with her eyes the strange little man, now kissing other white hands and bowing his adieux.

But she heard Madame du Hausset and replied:

"We were talking about religion: I was telling him why I believe in prayer."

Madame du Hausset laughed aloud, though quickly subsiding to the conventional tone:

"Sacré cœur! — the child has been preaching to Voltaire!"

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HE KISSED HER HAND, AN ACT OF COURTESY NEW TO DESTINE.

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Chapter VIII

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

THE guests were gone, the ladies-in-waiting dismissed. Destine and the Beauty-of-Bellevue were alone.

It was a pretty scene that followed — a pretty play of subtlety and sincerity; the Marquise, very artful in her endeavour to learn what she supposed the girl wished to conceal; Destine, shy, disturbed one moment, disarmed the next; always perfectly at sea as to the Marquise's aim.

She began with a light touch; mingled merriment and kindness.

"Come here, you little Saint and Singer! Didn't I hear Monsieur Voltaire call you that? Sit down here with me on this divan."

There was energy about the Marquise even when she reclined; always something purposeful in her pose.

She leaned back gracefully against the mauve satin upholstery, but there was decision in the

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rhythmical sway of her ivory fan. Her pink-slippered feet, emerging from a foam of flounces, were crossed and uptilted resolutely upon a gold embroidered cushion. One jewelled, lace-draped arm rested firmly upon the back of the divan.

Destine, somewhat timidly but with the natural grace and repose which abounding health imparts, seated herself beside this magnificence.

The Marquise spoke cheerily:

"I wish to get acquainted with you, ma chérie. Do you know you sang like an angel?"

Destine murmured 'merci,' sat a trifle further back on the divan, and shyly admired the flowered silk of Madame Pompadour's gown.

"But tell me," the Marquise continued, "is it true that you know nothing in music but Aves, Miserères and those Mother-Mary songs?"

"That is all we ever sing at St. Cyr."

"Mon Dieu! you must live there like a group of seraphim around the Eternal Throne! Do you know, I think the music of Heaven must be very stupid! — all two-four time and whole notes! I know I shall try to reform it as soon as I get there; introduce a few impish grace-notes, some saucy staccatos, and crowd in whole clusters

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of wicked sixteenths and frivolous trills!"

Destine was startled and bewildered at this nonchalant way of dipping into eternity for sauce to one's conversation.

But these words, and others that followed, were merely a preamble to the matter uppermost in Pompadour's mind.

She occasionally eyed the girl with a measuring glance that accurately tabulated her charms. A cherub-like, Dutch-tile sort of face! was the Pompadour's inward conclusion; except for the eyes! — yes, they were extraordinary. There was something about them that made you want to thank God for every sin you had avoided! Such eyes and such a voice! the Marquise mentally shrugged her shoulders; — attraction enough here to capture any man!

But above this under-depth of calculation, the conversation flowed pleasantly on. The Marquise enlightened Destine upon the wide scope of musical composition; eulogising the operas and especially the theories and advanced ideas of Glück, just then in his prime.

"With him grand opera becomes the crown of the composer's art! It is life set to music! tragedy

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tuned into harmony! emotion materialised into sound!"

Destine listened with round, wide eyes of wonder and delight.

She wished she could sing such music!

"You can't while you are caged in that convent —you poor little Bird-of-Paradise piping prayers and praise!"

The Marquise playfully pinched her cheek: "I'll wager you had never been heard by anyone but nuns and priests until I strayed into St. Cyr the other day! Had you?"

This was deftly calculated to bring forth the name of De Vrie—and it did; Destine being proud to tell of having once sung for a count.

It was a pity to waste so much art on what might have been had for the asking, but it was Pompadour's nature to make elaborate stage-work out of every situation.

When questioned further, Destine related the incident in the forest; told of the stranger's timely help, the ride to the convent, his departure without giving his name.

All this the Marquise interpreted as merely the prologue to a deep romance. She was determined

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to learn more, but maintained a manner thoroughly unconcerned.

"Ma foi!" she exclaimed brightly, arising from the divan and seating herself at the clavecin. "It is pretty enough to be set to music:

The Maid of St. Cyr
And the gay Cavalier!"

Whereupon she proceeded with pretended seriousness to show Destine how to make a grand opera of the story.

"First we would have the forest-music; in the orchestra a stream of harmony over which the conductor plies his baton, fishing up an occasional melody."

A few passes in the air with her fan served here as illustration.

"Then your opening solo, in the lilt of a waltz, because you are happy yet and free-hearted. Always remember that in grand opera we have life set to music; every laugh, an arpeggio; every sigh, a portamento; every tear, a tone. Physical pain is sounded by a harsh dissonance."

Madame Pompadour struck a stinging seventh on the keys.

"That tells of your entrapped foot. The brass

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instruments shriek out a crashing chord, the violins saw out an angular theme, but presto! we hear something different; the suggestion of a courtly dance; the Pavane, perhaps, or the Minuette: this announces the entrance of Monsieur, the Incognito Cavalier!"

With a smile, a toss of her hand, and an occasional bar of music, the Marquise managed to picture it all vividly.

She continued:

"After he releases the shackled heroine, a new note is heard, a different key; the music softly changes. A whispering melody fills the air, a new word is sung — *l'amour!*"

She spoke the word slowly, caressingly; at the same time furtively watching Destine, though appearing not to notice the sudden blush that flamed over her face.

"After the love-duet, our hero is mysteriously summoned away, and leaves without telling his name — Voila! the first act is finished. C'est joli, n'est-ce pas?"

The Marquise dashed off a galloping theme to pourtray the hero's departure.

A moment later she resumed boldly:

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"And now for the second act. Where should that be? In the convent garden perhaps, by moonlight? — or — was it in the chapel?"

A stroke sharp and sure, well-planned and carefully aimed; but the blood it drew was of a different colour from that which the Marquise expected. Destine, glad of a chance to explain, answered eagerly:

"Oh, Madame, I never saw the Count de Vrie again — I forgot to tell you."

Madame Pompadour turned sharply around, narrowing her eyes as she looked at the girl and asked in freezing tones:

"If you never saw him again and he did not give his name, how did you know it was the Count de Vrie?"

For answer, Destine quietly drew from the neck of her gown a little blue ribbon, to which was attached her precious souvenir.

"See, Madame, — his handkerchief. He tied it where the briers had torn my wrist, and I forgot to return it."

The Marquise took it all in at a glance! Quick to recognise her own mistakes, the Pompadour's mood rebounded from harsh distrust to

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impulsive affection. Gracious and generous when her own interests were unthwarted, the Marquise was suddenly all smiles and bright words, bent on atoning for her previous misjudgement.

She stood up and clasped the girl's face between her two hands; looked deep into her eyes for a moment and then said:

"Do you know what I shall do with you, ma chérie? I like you and I like your voice — I shall make you my protégée."

"O Madame!" rapturous wonder rested on Destine's face.

"Yes, — and you shall stay at Bellevue."

Destine could find no words to express her gratitude and joy.

"And you shall study music with Rameau!"

Destine kissed the Marquise's hand with impulsive fervour.

"And sing all the operas!" Madame Pompadour enjoyed watching the effect of her words, the increasing colour, the dimpling delight spreading over the young face like the glow of a spring morning.

"And you shall belong to my court, and become one of my ladies-in-waiting!"

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"Jésu Marie! — it is too wonderful!"

Madame Pompadour kissed the girl on both cheeks, patted her hand kindly, and enlarged with further enthusiasm upon the life to be led in a palace.

The Beauty-of-Bellevue was enjoying hugely a sense of good deeds done and to follow,

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Chapter IX

POMPADOUR SHATTERS A VASE

THAT same afternoon, a stranger called upon the Marquise. He did not give his name to the lacquey at the door, but sent up, instead, a ring from his finger.

He was admitted at once, although the Marquise had previously told Gourbellon she would see no more callers.

The newcomer wore a long cloak, a grey beard, an eye-glass. As he passed through the ante-room the gentlemen in attendance marked his fine bearing and buoyant step. They wondered who he could be to gain access so readily; surmised him a foreigner; a secret emissary perhaps from Austria, for high doings were going on at this time between Pompadour and Marie Thérèse.

They questioned the stranger's waiting-man, left behind in the corridor, but got little reward for their pains.

But one glance inside the boudoir, could they

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have had it, would have proved their suppositions all amiss. Here, with the door closed behind him, the visitor impetuously tore off his cloak, his disguise; rushed forward and knelt before the Marquise, covering her hands with kisses as he rapturously exclaimed:

"At last! at last! I am with you! Marquise, — tell me you are glad — just a little glad to see me!"

There was more of impatience than ardour in the reply he received:

"Of course I am glad — glad you are still alive! Do you realise it is the merest miracle that you have not yet been detected and clapped into the Bastille? What could have induced you to so wild a deed?"

"You — you were the inducement: you, always you," he murmured, still caressing her hands.

"But you imperilled me as well as yourself. You should have thought of me when you did this."

"I thought of nothing else; I could not leave you, don't you understand?" he pleaded.

"Yes, yes, of course; but the risk was too great. And you still endanger us both. How did you

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dare to venture coming here? It was madness."

"Marquise, do not blame me: I had to see you — I could not live without seeing you."

"But a lettre de cachet is not to be trifled with. You should have obeyed the King's command. But tell me more about it," she continued less severely. "Where did you find this remarkable substitute whose appearance deceived all but me?"

"In my stables at Vrieonne," Romain answered quietly; a far-away tone to his voice as he thought of Pierre, and the terrible price paid for this interview with the Marquise. He was thinking how different it was from what he had expected. He could not grasp it clearly, but vaguely realised that her words were not what he had hoped for; he had never dreamed she would upbraid him. He felt like one in a confusing nightmare, through which there penetrated the tones of her voice, strangely cold.

"At Vrieonne! Quelle merveille! — for a stable-boy so to resemble his master!"

There was a momentary pause. Then she added:

"You buried him, I suppose, at Montmartre? I heard of the funeral cortége."

"Yes," Romain answered, sadly.

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"And is it really a fact," the Marquise persisted, incredulously, "that he rests now alongside your father?"

Romain answered this with impulsive frankness.

"Not only is it true, but a most just irony of fate, for I think — I believe — he belongs there."

"But suppose you are recognised — the servants — Mon Dieu! I dare not think what the consequences might be were the least suspicion aroused. But there," she added more gently, noting the disappointment in his face, "I do not mean to chide you!"

He was standing before her with quiet dignity, and as she looked upon his handsome presence and thought of the reckless courage which had brought him there, her resentment became mellowed to admiration. Memory told her, too, that she was largely to blame for his folly. So her tones grew almost tender as she added:

"I am anxious about you, Romain, and cannot but realise your danger."

In a moment all his happiness returned.

"No danger fills me with terror but the danger of being separated from you! Come with me, Marquise, — Antoinette!"

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He drew nearer, then in low rapid tones came words of fire:

"You are all there is in the world! Do you know how I love you? Life is chaos and desolation without you! I love you as the first man loved the first woman! I see and hear no other. Your eyes burn into my soul! Your words tear into my heart. I kneel to you as to a shrine! I love you solemnly. Do you hear me? I love you savagely. I cannot live without you! Come with me, Antoinette, — come with me!"

His voice trembled with emotion. "Let us leave this dangerous Court. We will hide from all eyes; even the far-reaching sight and knowledge of King Louis."

Madame Pompadour was swayed by the intensity of his words. She allowed herself to wonder what might be the joy of life with such a lover. It would require no effort on her part to hold his love and admiration. How tired she at times became of her struggle to maintain the King's regard! The thought made her sigh, but at the same time recalled her to actualities.

Very practical and decisive was the answer she gave.

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"No, no, it is impossible: think of the many who depend upon me; my followers, my family, my protégés. They all are at the mercy of the King's favour through me. Ah! the curses of my enemies are already hard to bear; those of my friends would be still more terrible. No — no, Romain, it is enough to guard yourself from present dangers; do not seek for greater ones."

She did not speak the further thought that flitted through her mind; the prospect of giving up the pomp, power and palaces now at her command. There was unwavering firmness in her tones as she refused. Romain noted this and felt the easy indifference with which she disregarded his plea. He was still too much under the spell of her presence to perceive all the calculating hardness of her nature, or to realise fully what a play-thing she had made of him, but the chill of her words sank in. His heart grew cold; he did not speak.

By way of atonement the Marquise gracefully, impulsively, rested both her hands on his shoulders and looked at him with studied tenderness. Though she cast him from her, she still wished to hold his love — his and every other man's —

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firmly, devotedly and forever. The room was shadowed by the dusk of evening, but Romain could see her expressive eyes and fascinating smile as she stood thus near him.

Suddenly she drew away, and he too sprang from her side in alarm, for Gourbellon had plunged into the room without ceremony.

"The King, Madame, demands an immediate interview!"

Frantically the Marquise motioned De Vrie toward the balcony, but before he could retreat thus far, the King entered.

"Your Majesty's visit is an unexpected honour," Madame Pompadour hazarded in nervous tones, barely concealing her agitation. She could not surmise what had brought him unannounced. All manner of dire conjectures rushed across her mind. Her terror for the moment was somewhat modified by the fact that De Vrie was luckily standing in the deep shadow of the window draperies, and had not been observed.

Nerved by nature to emergencies, she directed every energy toward surmounting this one. After seating the King with his back to the window, through which there now penetrated the last

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weary light of day, she bade Gourbellon not to bring candles until summoned.

"The radiance of the Royal Presence lends brightness enough," she said, but this flattering unction was lost upon the King, who seemed buried in his thoughts. He did not even see the gentleman's cloak and other paraphernalia of disguise that were lying on the floor.

"Is your Majesty's mood one of gloom or gladness?" she ventured, recklessly determined to allow no moment of silence.

"Gloom!" was the laconic reply, "we have been wearied for an hour by the babblings of two bare-pated presidents and a priest."

"About the Parliament, I suppose? — or is it that Prussian princeling Frederick? — either one should be annihilated!"

Madame Pompadour stamped her dainty foot and moved about impatiently, fluttering here and there; the frou-frou of her flounces suggesting the ruffled feathers of an agitated bird.

She talked rapidly, excitedly, and — never at a loss for words to denounce or ridicule her most distant and distinguished enemy, Frederick of Prussia, — she managed to divert the King from

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noticing any sound of stealthy steps taken by De Vrie in his endeavour to reach the balcony.

But suddenly, for no known reason, the King looked around, and then — powers of Heaven! — the very firmament conspired in the catastrophe, for at this moment the full moon, emerging from a cloud, beamed white and clear upon the balcony, touching with soft, high lights the straight, tense back and broadset shoulders of one — who saw his star of fate fast sinking.

Louis bounded from his seat in a passion of rage, at the same time drawing his sword.

"Sacré cœur! a man in your room when the King calls! Your insults, Madame, are of no mean proportion!"

He started forward, overturning a chair as he shoved it aside; his sword at an angle to run the intruder through like a dog.

Madame Pompadour, powerless to restrain the King's fury, followed his movements in pale agony, while the fugitive on the balcony, realising that all was lost, faced about. Too true a courtier to draw his own weapon against the King, he stood there immobile, unflinching, as he awaited the impending sword-thrust.

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Suddenly Madame Pompadour's voice rang out with strange tensity: "Hold! Your Majesty!"

She grasped the King's arm, and pointed with horror toward the motionless figure at the window. Palpitating terror permeated every inflection of her awe-hushed tones as she gaspingly exclaimed:

"Look! It is the *dead Count de Vrie!*"

Louis raised his eyes to the pallid face of the moon-lit shape on the balcony. Then his sword dropped from his hand as he beheld the form and features he had seen dead and cold in the forest of St. Germain; in appearance the self-same body upon which the rash Pompadour had flung the contents of her wine-cup.

Unnerved at the sight, the superstitious King instinctively crossed himself.

But Madame Pompadour knew full well that this effective climax must not endure too long. She took a step backward and with her foot upset a tall fragile vase, standing close to the clavecin. However ancient and common the trick, a noise was still a noise, and human nerves are so strung that a person when startled will look around. The King at once turned his head to observe the cause of the clatter. When he looked again to the window, the ghost had disappeared.

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It was not at all difficult for Madame Pompadour now to give way to a paroxysm of hysterical weeping.

"It is because I mocked at his corpse! Mon Dieu! to think — I am to be haunted and pursued by a ghost!"

She seemed inconsolable, but the King, standing beside her in thoughtful silence, appeared less dismayed.

"Are you certain that no one could have been on the balcony?"

A new terror seized her, as she excitedly answered:

"No, no, impossible! I have been here the entire afternoon."

Regardless of her words, his Majesty composedly walked to the window.

"Let me first order lights," she quickly besought in a desperate effort to detain him, but the King was not to be detained.

Madame Pompadour could only look on in mute helplessness, convinced that her last move had been made. She covered her face with her hands, trying to nerve herself for the terrible moment when the King should discover De Vrie.

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She heard the King step out upon the balcony. A few moments of deathlike suspense followed, and then a hand rested upon her shoulder. She looked up and saw the King, who quietly announced:

"There is no one there. It is exceeding strange."

To conceal her amazement and relief required all her ability as an actress.

"Let us tell no one about it," she presently suggested with apparent thoughtfulness, "or does your Majesty prefer to recount the tale?"

"No, indeed," he replied; "I am more than willing to keep the adventure quiet, having no desire to start a fashion in ghosts!"

The calmness of this reply was not altogether satisfactory to the Marquise. The King's terror had too quickly subsided: it suggested a tinge of doubt. She must spirit up his credulity. With a convincing shiver, she exclaimed:

"What an appalling experience! What would have become of me without the comforting presence of your Majesty!" Her manner was that of nervous prostration. "I doubt if I shall sleep for a week!"

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"You are unnerved, and in need of repose: we will therefore leave you." Louis started to go.

"But, Sire!" there was thrilling entreaty in her tones, "you do not leave me in anger?"

"Far from it," the King replied promptly. "You are Louis' best comrade; the only one who never gives ennui. Ma foi! you supply new diversions every time I call! Did I not know that you avoid repeating your effects, I might tremble to appear here again! Today's experience has well changed the current of my thoughts, but I should not enjoy a second visitation!"

Was all this genuine? or did his words convey a shade of sarcasm? The Favourite was troubled.

"I entreat you, Sire, do not make a jest of so strange a theme. But the matter is more ominous to me than to you. It makes me tremble. Do you not pity me, Sire? and feel sorry for la pauvre Pompadour?"

"You have our best thoughts and sympathy." There was kindliness in Louis' tone, but his manner, as he bade her good-day and presently left the room, indicated a thoughtful mood.

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Chapter X

A GHOST MOANS IN THE GARDEN

AS soon as the King was gone, Madame Pompadour hastened to the fateful balcony and found it vacant as he had said. She looked down at the great distance Romain must have dropped, and shuddered. How could he have made the leap in safety?

She peered out into the grounds, looking at the dimly outlined shrubbery and statues, but could see no moving figure. She was puzzled to know how he could have escaped unobserved.

She turned away, but suddenly stopped and turned back. The sound of a low moan reached her. Again looking down, she saw a prostrate form, almost concealed by the shadows.

He was there — and hurt! Mon Dieu! what was to be done!

Like sudden darkness, the sense of a great danger rushed upon her. Suppose he should be found there under her window by the servants! —

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there was not one of them whom she could trust — or suppose he should die!

Fast and wildly these thoughts thronged her mind. She dashed across the floor, snatched up the dark cloak, plunged into the adjoining bedroom, flung open a door, sped down a small servants' stairway — out to the gardens. No one had seen her. It was but a step to the clump of bushes where Romain lay helpless with a broken leg. He heard her approach, and raised himself upon his elbow as she drew near. She knelt beside him, excitedly asking questions in rapid hushed tones:

"Are you much hurt?"

"A bone or two broken, that's all."

"Saints in Heaven! — what shall we do?"

"Lemoyne was here; he will help us."

"Lemoyne? how did he find you?"

"Got worried about me and wandered out here to look."

"Was he in the château?"

"Yes, in the ante-room, waiting."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone to find some exit from the grounds that is not guarded."

"There is none."

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"None? then he must lift me over the walls."

"Impossible; the river would have to be crossed."

"Sacré! then he must carry me through the gates."

"Never!" the Marquise arose determinedly; "the guards would offer assistance, ask questions, uncover your disguise, the King would hear of it —No; it is not to be thought of."

Lemoyne at this moment returned. On seeing him, Madame Pompadour announced resolutely:

"There is but one thing to do. Lift the Count on your shoulders — carefully — there! Now follow me."

The exertion caused Romain to sink into unconsciousness.

When Romain revived, he found himself lying on a couch, in a room of strange proportions. It was triangular in shape; in place of windows there were square apertures beneath the ceiling. These, he learned afterwards, shot up diagonally to the roof, thereby admitting air and some light. The room was furnished like an armoury with shields and weapons hung upon the sombre oaken

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walls, while bolted chests were standing here and there upon the tiled brick floor. Piled up near the fireplace, which appeared never yet to have been used, were fuel and a flint-box. A few costly rugs concealed the bareness of the bricks and gave the only suggestion of comfort the place offered.

A layer of dust was perceptible everywhere and the room, as a whole, imparted a feeling of reticence and unwelcome, like a person that does not wish to be disturbed. There seemed to be no door.

Just as Romain arrived at this discovery, one of the panels opened inward, and Lemoyne entered bearing a bowl of water.

"Ah, you have revived!" he exclaimed gladly, "I was growing alarmed."

"Where are we?" Romain questioned.

Lemoyne shrugged his shoulders. "Do not ask me now: there is more important work at hand."

Experience as a soldier had taught Lemoyne something of surgery. Hastening again through the swinging panel, he returned with linen napery which he tore into bandages. Carefully removing the Count's hose, Lemoyne proceeded to set the broken limb.

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The unfortunate Count was too fully occupied with the pain to have any further feelings of curiosity. The operator's work, though awkwardly done, was carried on with determination to the end.

At last the ordeal was over, and the limb securely bandaged.

The equerry's next act was to build a fire. Then he silently busied himself with boiling some water in an iron kettle which hung from a crane.

Although De Vrie's leg was broken, his spirit was not, as his words presently evinced.

"In the name of the Holy Sepulchre! — where are we? You need not think I am so weak I can't talk! What kind of a room do you call this?"

"A private apartment in Bellevue." There was some show of humour in Lemoyne's emphasis upon the word "private." His mood was indeed quite jovial; so relieved was he to have found this retreat after the frenzy of anxiety occasioned by Romain's accident.

"And how did we get here?"

With provoking composure Lemoyne examined the kettle before replying, then answered at length:

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"I carried you on my back, the Marquise led the way; a wondrous weary way, I can tell you. As I remember now, it was around corners, through walls, over chasms, along caverns, into tunnels, out again, up stairs and down! I thought I should stumble at every step."

"Do you mean to imply that we are underground, or in a tower?" persisted Romain.

"In simple truth, dear Count, I do not know the intricacies of its architecture. It is a hidden room designed for refuge in case of political extremities. You and I are the only ones who know of its existence, save the Marquise and the King."

"The King!" Romain started up from his couch, but quickly subsided with a groan.

"Don't be frightened," reassured Lemoyne. "The Marquise tells me his Majesty has no occasion ever to come here, and if he did, would in all likelihood need her to guide him, for the entrance is intricate and he doubtless has forgotten the trick."

Lemoyne paused again to peer into the kettle, where a multitude of eager bubbles were exhausting themselves in a short-lived struggle to get at the top and stay there.

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"Here is cognac for you, and hot water," the serving-man announced. "That will brace you up until the Marquise calls again. Tomorrow I am to smuggle in provisions, and we shall stay here until you can walk."

Romain silently took the extended glass; then, before touching it to his lips, a stifling sense of gratitude caused his eyes suddenly to fill with tears. He did not say a word, but the look he gave Lemoyne told all his deep appreciation of the equerry's non-upbraiding faithfulness.

Lemoyne sought to lighten this tension of feeling by saying cheerily:

"I think you will fare here very well. And for a man who is supposed to be dead and wandering around as a ghost, you enjoy many material comforts!"

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Chapter XI

POMPADOUR'S HALO

A FEW hours of solitude in which to think over the dangerous events of the afternoon might have been welcome to Madame Pompadour, but so many interests held her life that even the most dramatic and alarming situations became scarcely more than incidents.

That same evening she answered a score of urgent letters. The next morning, while at her toilet, she listened to the requests of a line of petitioners who waited in the ante-room for an audience; one pleading for the release of a prisoner in the Bastille, another soliciting a promotion in the army, the next asking a subscription to aid the sufferers from the great earthquake in Lisbon.

Among the waiting applicants were distinguished Jesuits, rash in presenting themselves where they were most unwelcome, but earnest in their endeavours to induce her to persuade the

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King to show more clemency toward their Order.

Monsieur de Machault, her staunchest friend (become so because she had persistently promoted him), was in her boudoir the entire morning, assisting her decisions and discussions. He it was who gave support to all her schemes against her arch-enemy, the Prime Minister, d'Argenson.

In a certain sense, no less important than Machault himself was another person in the boudoir; a dapper, well-scented, much-bejewelled little man, by name the Sieur Dagé; by occupation none other than hair-dresser to her Majesty and to every other "grande dame" who could possibly secure his services.

This remarkable personage, who drove in his gilded coach and who made such an art of his profession that a large volume on the subject was published, had become so autocratic that Madame Pompadour herself esteemed it a favour to have him dress her hair. His mannerisms, grace, and daintiness of touch as he worked were no small part of his art. His manipulation of Madame Pompadour's tresses as she posed in a morning gown of pale satin, her slippered feet resting upon a cushion that matched her gown, formed a picture

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that of itself had made her toilette receptions famous. Never once under Dagé's hands did her hair appear disordered: every stage in the performance was artistic.

While the hot tongs and combs were deftly handled, disposing curls and puffs in their proper order, one caller after another was received and dismissed, until only Machault, Dr. Quesnay, and a few other *intimes* remained.

The Doctor, who was running through a book he had taken from the table, suddenly remarked, apropos of nothing:

"I have frequently asked myself who is the greatest writer the world has known, but I have never found a satisfactory answer."

"I can tell you at once," spoke up the Marquise from her post at the dressing-table. "The greatest writer the world has known was that most devout of Catholics, Cornelius Jansen, the famous Bishop of Ypres."

Even Madame du Hausset joined in the laugh which greeted this tribute to the father of Jansenism. But Madame Pompadour quickly added:

"Do not laugh; I am quite serious. Cornelius Jansen wrote one book which, it is generally

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conceded, no mortal ever read through, and yet because of this one book, the whole world has been shaken with discussion for over a hundred years, with the result that today every Catholic who is not a Jesuit proclaims himself a Jansenist! What other man ever acquired such lasting fame by writing one book that no one could read? Ma foi! I wake up in the night sometimes and laugh out loud at the thought of what a wonderful writer was Cornelius Jansen!"

With the air of one who has proved his point and enjoyed a triumph, Madame Pompadour turned again to her glass and watched the manœuvres of Dagé.

But the Abbé de Bernis took occasion to differ with the Marquise, who was always so eloquent on any subject approaching the Jesuits that her best friends were not above goading her on, though well aware that disparaging remarks about this powerful Order were almost as dangerous, if overheard, as disapproving words about the King. Madame Pompadour was wise in many ways, but her caution ran short in one direction; she set no guard to her tongue when at ease in her own boudoir;—a fatal feminine

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weakness which has wrought the undoing of more than one high-stationed lady, before and since.

"There is still some difference of opinion," De Bernis was saying, "as to whether the book has been read or not. For my part, in spite of all assertions to the contrary, I cannot believe that Pope Innocent X. would have condemned what he did not read."

"Bah! of course he did not read it," insisted the Marquise. "It killed Jansen to write it! — three volumes in fine Latin on the subject of Free Grace! Sanctissima! it would kill anyone to read it!"

"Well, the Pope died!" protested De Bernis with good humour. But Madame Pompadour laid aside her light tone, and took this point seriously.

"Yes, poor man, he died of a troubled conscience for having taken the word of the Jesuits instead of knowing for himself what he condemned."

"But Pope Innocent condemned the book because of its five heretical sentences, and these, you know, were submitted to him," stubbornly persisted De Bernis.

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Madame Pompadour turned upon him with animation:

"Monsieur l'Abbé, you need converting!" and she proceeded then and there to enlighten him; Dagé, the meanwhile, dexterously following her every movement with the hot iron, which he handled like a wizard's wand.

"Now listen to me. In the first place, this book with its ponderous contents and title, 'Augustinus,' aroused the Jésuits because it dared to antagonise the teachings of their own revered writer, Molinas. That's clear, n'est-ce pas?" and she checked off the item with one finger; growing more vehement as she continued:

"So our esteemed friends, les Jésuites, submit to the Pope five sentences which they claim are culled from the obnoxious book. And behold, our Pope Innocent was so exceedingly innocent that he never noted the omission of page or chapter to identify the sentences with the book! Comprenez?"

De Bernis obediently nodded, and the Marquise proceeded:

"Bien! So his Holiness condemns the famous five sentences and thereby the entire book. Then

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the turmoil began! Friends of the dead Bishop maintained he was too devout a Catholic to have written anything heretical, and they flatly denied that the sentences were in the book. Of course the matter could not be proved because, as I said before, no one could read the book! Oh, — they tried to read it! Louis XIV. engaged a distinguished savant to wade through the massive tomes in search of those five heretical statements, and it stands on record that he emerged from the struggle with the ambiguous report that 'if the five propositions were in, they were *in*cognito!' Does this disturb the Jesuits? Not at all! They serenely retort that to doubt the existence of the heretical sentences is to doubt the Pope who condemned them! There you have it! The fight is pivoted upon the question of Papal Infallibility: the Jesuits for, the Jansenists against."

Madame Pompadour's vehemence was steadily growing; hands and shoulders gave emphasis to her words:

"And what is the climax — the capstone — of this monumental dispute? The Paris clergy (all Jesuits) put their perruques together and devise a decree that serves to excommunicate, brand

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as a heretic, exile, destroy, every priest and teacher who will not swear — what? — swear that he believes those famous sentences are in Jansen's book!"

Madame Pompadour stamped her foot, and shoved the hassock aside:

"Mon Dieu! If it were not for its tragedies, the story of the quarrel between the Jesuits and Jansenists would be droll enough to make the gods laugh!"

"But you do not blame the Jesuits for all the tragedies of the famous contention?" suggested De Bernis, for no other reason than to keep the ball rolling.

"Blame them! Of course I do! I blame them for everything that troubles France today. The Jansenist-Jesuit feud is no longer a religious controversy; it is a political war. The Jesuits are an unscrupulous Order of hypocrites who by underhand methods are appropriating all the wealth and power of France. They have spread over the face of the earth like a plague."

Madame Pompadour had so far forgotten Dagé as to get up during this last tirade and walk the length of the room and back. The little

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man patiently awaited her return, and when she sat down again, resumed his work as though nothing had happened.

Everyone had been observing the Marquise with keen and admiring interest; everyone but Gourbellon, who maintained his position at the door like a wax figure, and to all appearances had neither eyes nor ears for the scene about him. But appearances are deceiving. It happened that of all who were present, none heard so much as this *valet de chambre* whose business it was to hear nothing.

After a short pause, Madame Pompadour continued:

"People say I hate the Jesuits because they refuse me Communion. Quelle stupidité! It is just the other way. They refuse me the Sacrament because of my hatred! I would annihilate the entire Order if it were in my power: sweep them out of France like dirt from a back door! — I hope you are not a Jesuit, Dagé?" she suddenly remarked to the hair-dresser.

"I have no need to be, Madame, as I make enough money in my own profession."

This sally was received with a laugh, which

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served to lighten Madame Pompadour's tone when she next spoke.

"People tell me I am rash to speak so plainly; that the Jesuits in revenge may assassinate me. But I know they will never do that, because then, you see, I would be a martyr! and the King, in loving memory, would carry out my wishes more fully than he does now. Oh, no; the Jesuits will never make me a martyr! For then I would be a saint! N'est-ce pas? Are not all martyrs saints? They would call me Sainte Jeanne Antoinette! I think I would look attractive in a little niche with candles in front of me! Say, Dagé! arrange my hair in a halo, please!"

Extravagant hilarity was not an uncommon mood with the Pompadour, if there were those about her who could value her effects. To the amusement of all present the great Dagé took her at her word, and in a trice had inserted some puffs under her front hair which he drew loosely back from her temples.

"Voilà, Madame, is the halo!" The full puff of pale yellowish hair outlining her face produced indeed something of the effect she had desired. Everyone laughed and applauded, all declaring

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she was suited to a halo as a king to a crown. And, in truth, the style was so becoming that she told Dagé to leave it.

When the *toilette* was over, there came the *poste* from Paris with its fretful array of complaints, attacks, aspersions, and scurrilous poems. After an hour spent with the mail, there followed a long consultation with Monsieur Colin, her secretary, about the preparations for a fête she had planned to have at Bellevue on the 18th.

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Chapter XII

TWO LIGHTS IN BELLEVUE

AT one o'clock the blue and gold coach was in waiting to convey the Marquise to Versailles, where Her Majesty, the Queen, at this hour dined alone, though in state. Visitors meanwhile came pay their respects and disturb her digestion.

It is matter of history that Madame Pompadour never failed to present herself once a week before the Queen. Being a martyr to etiquette and the King's commands, the Queen always received Madame Pompadour with outward kindness.

Today, after leaving Her Majesty's apartment, the Marquise sought an audience with the King: she was anxious to know how much, if any, the scene of the previous afternoon had reacted upon him. But what was her astonishment and dismay on being informed that the King had gone to Paris to hold a Lit de justice of the Parliament.

A Lit de justice! Madame Pompadour could hardly grasp the fact. A Lit de justice! No such

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thing had happened for twenty years! It seemed inconceivable that Louis of his own accord should take so autocratic a step. If only she had known beforehand!

She wondered why Machault had not told her that morning.

The summons to the Parliament, she now learned, had only been issued the day before. This accounted for Louis' unceremonious appearance at Bellevue. He had come to consult with her. On second thought she was glad Marchault had not presumed to offer the information: she would not for worlds have him know she had not been told.

A Lit de justice! Mon Dieu! what would happen next? She knew the King's susceptibility to the influence of whomever chanced to be near him. She thought of d'Argenson now at his side, and of the countless whisperings about herself which that potentate would surely sift into the King's ear along with the parliamentary reports. She trembled lest the after-taste of yesterday's experience in her boudoir had left the King in a mood to give credence to whatever he heard against her.

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Without further hesitation, she decided to make all speed to Paris.

There was a hurried drive back to Bellevue, where hasty directions were given and a small retinue selected to accompany the Marquise to the capital. Madame du Hausset was instructed to remain at Bellevue, acting as chaperon and mentor to Destine.

Then Madame Pompadour, unobserved, made her way to the hiding-place which sheltered Romain de Vrie. There was a hidden panel in her boudoir which opened upon a narrow passage that led to a small flight of stairs descending directly to the concealed apartment.

At the foot of the little stairs she was met by Lemoyne, who had heard her approach. He held back the swinging door for her to enter, but she hesitated and cast a questioning glance across the room at the couch upon which Romain lay.

"Has he rested comfortably?"

"He does now, Madame, for I gave him a sleeping-potion."

While he spoke, Lemoyne could not but observe the splendour of the Marquise's appearance; the dull and severe surroundings of the little room

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making her seem like a visitor from another world. She was in evident haste, and suddenly turned about with the decisive words:

"Come with me."

He followed her up to the boudoir where, after quickly closing the panel behind them, she proceeded to instruct Lemoyne how to act during her absence.

"You must be most careful in your movements. I will give you charge over my apartment here, so you can pass in and out of the panel without danger of being seen. Whatever happens, let no one suspect there is a hidden room. I would advise you to have little to do with the rest of my household. I have sent them all down below, where we will go now, and I will introduce you as the Keeper of the Boudoir."

All the time she was talking, the Marquise was hurriedly drawing on her gloves; then she motioned Lemoyne to assist her on with her cloak which was spread upon a chair in readiness.

"You must buy everything you need at Meudon," she continued, "and tell your Master I shall return in a day or two; that the King has called a Lit de justice. And tell him, too, that

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he can rest in security where he is for the King suspects nothing. Now I am ready."

A large assemblage of uniformed attendants had gathered in the courtyard, where Madame Pompadour presently appeared, gorgeous in ermines, ready to start for Paris.

At her side was Lemoyne, whom she solemnly presented as "Keeper of the Boudoir;" an emergency office as undesired by its holder as it was coveted by others the moment they heard of its creation.

The imposing coach and retinue were soon bowed out of the porte-cochère by those who were not included in the party. They watched the departure with wistful eyes, for a visit to Paris always came as a welcome diversion.

At Bellevue only two lights, aside from the watchman's lantern, were to be seen at midnight in the château. One beamed from a little window in the servants' quarters, where an occupant was busily penning a long letter in cypher. The writer's expression was tense and determined as he took great pains to be accurate. He was partly disrobed, having laid aside his coat and half-

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unfastened his shirt, exposing a broad, strong chest. Directly over his heart he bore the mark of two distinct letters, indelibly stamped upon his flesh — "I. L.:" the portentous initials of Ignatius Loyola. To the world at large he was Gourbellon, a faithful servant of the Marquise, who little dreamed he was a still more faithful servant of the Jesuits. He belonged to that mysterious fifth class of the Order, who wore no distinguishing garb and did not proclaim their connection with the Society. A cultured man, highly educated, studious, travelled, and wealthy, he had given up everything, time, money, and identity, to this far-reaching, earnest-working Order of Jesus. Devout, self-abnegating and obedient to his vows, he typified the ideals of Loyola's Society.

The letter now under his pen was indited to his Superior, and contained a careful report of Madame Pompadour's words spoken that morning at her toilette; "a faithful and true account of the views and designs upon our Order entertained by this scandalous and corrupt woman of infamous power." Beneath these words the document was signed with a cryptic mark.

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While Gourbellon was at work on his letter, someone else in another part of the château was similarly occupied. Though also alone and en déshabillé this writer appeared neither tense nor determined but revealed, instead, an occasional smile. Destine was writing to her friend, Adrienne, at St. Cyr.

After telling of her wonderful good fortune in becoming the Pompadour's protégée, she continued:

"I wish you could see this room; the ceiling is about as high as our chapel, and the mantel 'most as big as an altar. There are burning candles upon it, and a clock that just now is striking the hour of twelve — midnight. I shall not do it often, but I did want to know how it feels to sit up as late as I like, and burn plenty of candles! Madame du Hausset tells me every room is allowed twenty candles a day, and those I do not use I can sell!

"This room used to belong to Madame de Pompadour's daughter. She is dead, and the Marquise has never ceased to grieve for her. She was called the Princess Alexandrine. I somewhat resemble her, Madame du Hausset says, and this is why the

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Marquise has taken a fancy to me and has given me this room.

"I was surprised to know that Madame de Pompadour had a daughter and I asked: 'Where is Monsieur de Pompadour?' This led to my learning something about the Marquise that greatly shocked me.

"Ah, Adrienne! I have found out a great deal about the ways of the world and the inner life of Versailles since I came here. This discovery has saddened and troubled me. I am wondering whether I should tell Sister Therese. But I will confide in you first and see what you think.

"In reply to my question about Madame de Pompadour's husband, Madame du Hausset explained to me that his name was not Pompadour but d'Etiolles, and he is not living with her at all. She is *divorced!*

"Imagine how amazed I was to hear this, and embarrassed too, for I had bumped right up against the skeleton in the cupboard.

"But although I have told you this, dear Adrienne, I hope you will not think too ill of the Marquise. She is kind and lovely, and everyone seems to like her very much, in spite of the shadow

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on her life. All the nobility come here to visit. There is a special apartment reserved for the Dauphin and Dauphine, and one even for the King. Madame du Hausset showed them to me this afternoon.

"The Marquise has gone to Paris. You should have seen the procession of carriages! — six of them! — and the outriders and postillions and the horses with gold-embroidered trappings! It was like a picture in a fairy-tale, but the most beautiful part of all was the Marquise herself as she sat in her wonderful coach; her fair, delicate features outlined by the crimson cushions. She made one think of a cameo gem in a gold casket.

"She will return in a few days, for there is to be a grand fête here on the 18th. Madame du Hausset says I may look on, from one of the alcoves. The King is to be here, so you can tell Fanchon and the others that I am actually to see his Majesty — from a distance!

"I wish you and Sister Therese were here with me. I should feel much happier and more at home. I don't mind confessing that I am not yet accustomed to living in a palace, as the grandeur is too overpowering for comfort. I know I shall

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never, never get over being afraid of the servants; they are so magnificent and silent; one would think they were made of wax. And then — just between you and me — I feel very small and lonely in this great big room. The woodwork snaps sometimes at night and I get so afraid I cover my head. I look under the bed after saying my prayers and then jump in quick!

"I forgot to explain about that embroidery you promised to finish for me. The border must be worked with gold thread; but perhaps Sister Therese can tell you the design. Please give her my compliments and my faithful love. Tell her there is a chapel here in the château and the Abbé de Bernis holds Mass on Sundays.

"Mon Dieu! Princess Alexandrine's clock has struck one!

"Well — I think I have told you everything of my life and feelings here, so now, dear Adrienne, I will close. Please don't forget to water my narcissus.

"Je vous embrace tendrement.

"Votre bien dévouée ;

"Destine."

As she folded the letter carefully, and sealed it

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with the perfumed wax which the dainty desk afforded, Destine was conscious that she had not told Adrienne quite all. She had not divulged the uppermost feeling, the overtone that rested upon her emotions: the pain, the wonder, the burning joy, of being among living memories of the Count de Vrie.

She had heard his name spoken, had talked about him, had been with his friends, and was counted as one of them. She felt in the very atmosphere of his presence. Though she knew he was dead, he seemed to be near.

Pensively she extinguished the candles; one by one each gentle flame bent over and succumbed to her breath. For a moment there was darkness, then slowly the spell of a thousand stars stole into the room and drew Destine to the window. It was a sight to hush the senses. Destine felt her spirit swing out into the soaring splendour of the night — the wide, blue brilliancy of heaven. She wondered where *he* was, among all those whirling worlds! She imagined herself away among them, wandering in search of him, seeking unceasingly, knocking at the door of every star.

Destine caught herself up sharply: her face was

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flushed from her daring thoughts. She opened the window wide to catch the cooling air, and looked with eager, questioning glance at the shadowy bushes in the star-lit gardens, the dreamy statues and vague pathways.

Then again she raised her eyes to the sapphire vault above; all her heart and soul were reaching out with one great throb of longing.

But there came no sound upon the stillness; not a fluttering leaf to confuse the senses; — there was no least sign of answering spirit.

And yet things happen strangely. At that same hour in the unknown room where Romain de Vrie was concealed, he awakened with a start.

"Lemoyne! did you speak?"

Lemoyne, from his bed on the floor, answered sleepily:

"No, — why?"

"I thought someone called me. I must have been dreaming."

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Chapter XIII

WHEN POMPADOUR WENT TO PARIS

MADAME POMPADOUR'S entourage numbered something over half-a-hundred, and included every class of service from titled ladies and gentlemen who waited upon her in the salon, down to flambeau bearers and the four negroes who carried her sedan chair.

Among those who had been left behind when the Marquise rushed off to Paris were two young men, Neveu and Treon, who specially felt the indignity which they thought she had flung upon them. Neither one liked being left behind nor being subordinated to a new man with a new title.

The day after her departure, they consoled themselves in the lower ante-room by playing cavignol and drinking wine; shuffling coins and cards with typical eighteenth-century disregard of time and money. While talking on various subjects, they wagered this and wagered that, over every disputed point. Finally the game

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lagged to indifference when they began to discuss, in somewhat husky tones, the new man, Lemoyne.

"He is very mysterious in his bearing, this newly-installed Grand Mogul: always in a hurry when you meet him, never speaks but to say 'Good day,' and slips around in a foxy way —."

Treon, black-eyed, tall, spindle and spidery, finished his sentence with a shoulder-shrug, and held out his glass for more wine.

Neveu, a silky-voiced person who wore black velvet, mechlin lace and eau-de-violette, pursued the subject with considerable gravity:

"His office, it appears to me, is more mysterious than his bearing. I don't mind confessing to you that the matter has greatly aroused my curiosity; so much so that this morning I slipped into the boudoir at a time when I was positive he was away." The speaker leaned over the table confidentially and gave a knowing wink as he added: — "Never mind how I got in! There I was looking through the Marquise's desk when, suddenly hearing a noise behind me, I turned around and as I live and breathe, if there wasn't this infernal Keeper of the Boudoir, bowing polite as the Devil and asking if there was anything he could do for

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me! I wanted to strangle him! He couldn't have appeared more suddenly if he had risen through the floor."

The satin-damask in Neveu's tones had taken on an edge that suggested ripping selvage. Hatred gleamed in his eye, and bespoke a viperish determination to rid Bellevue of this soft-stepping sphinx who had caught him in the boudoir and would surely tattle the damaging tale to Pompadour.

Treon, apparently much impressed by the narrative, nodded his head wisely and lowered his voice as he responded with a maudlin attempt at seriousness:

"I tell you the ways of Providence are easy to discern compared to the ways of Pompadour! Do you know what I think? It is my suspicion that this Keeper of the Boudoir is serving-man to our lady's latest lover." Treon paused to drain his glass, and then added with tipsy levity and a sing-song rythm:

"But who he is, or where he is,
'Tis beyond me to discover!"

Neveu looked about him nervously, "Have a little caution how you speak; these days a man

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should hold his tongue more guarded than his sword."

This sage remark was apparently illustrated and confirmed by the entarnce at that moment of Lemoyne himself, just returned from an errand to Meudon. He was intending to bow as he passed, and hasten on through the apartment, but Neveu, quick to seize the opportunity, intercepted him after whispering to Treon: "Ten louis to one, he will not join us."

"Good Monsieur Lemoyne, we have been longing for a sight of you."

"Your longings are not high, Messieurs!" said Lemoyne, equalling the other's tone of courtliness, "but now that I have gratified them, pray permit me to pass."

During this dialogue Treon had found time to note a slight protuberance in Lemoyne's coat.

"First allow me," requested this observing one, with malicious intent, as he playfully extended his sword, "Your cloak does not set well," where upon he deftly tossed the garment aside, and revealed under Lemoyne's arm a bottle of wine.

"Oh, pardon my sportiveness," Treon gaily added with drunken raillery, "My manners are

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fitted only for gentlemen; a class that never *conceal* wine, — they *share* it!"

"Sapristi! — they share it with their equals!" hotly retorted Lemoyne. "So do I when I meet them: to company less refined I *surrender* it!" and with this he flung the bottle at Treon who dexterously caught it and, handing it to his companion, boisterously exclaimed:

"Ma foi! — he came near spilling good wine! It would be better, I am thinking, to spill bad blood!"

At this his sword flashed out ready for a lunge. Lemoyne drew and took position, remarking as he did so:

"You are rash, Sir, to fight with a sober man."

Treon, with the cupidity of a wine-hot brain, blithely answered:

"You are right; a sober man is worth two in their cups. You have made me feel my danger, and, to be fair, it is plain that my friend here must help to defend me. Is it not so, Monsieur Neveu?"

Neveu, delighted at the prospect of so quick a revenge on his enemy, answered with avidity,

"Most certainly; — two steels that waver,

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against one that is sure: a perfectly fair game, — otherwise it would be rank murder."

"Good logic, Neveu! — good logic! Come, my good Monsieur Lemoyne. A duel à trois! The only seconds we have are the seconds we spend in the fight!"

Laughing loudly at his pun and without further parley or precept, he made a rush upon Lemoyne and was at once followed by Neveu.

Their swords were by no means so unsteady as they had pretended, and Lemoyne soon perceived they were not merely playing with their foils. There was determined animosity in the two pairs of eyes that flashed hither and thither before him, while he sought to parry the strokes that flew in maddening succession. No rules were heeded, no pause was granted, no breathing-chance between the encounters.

Lemoyne was fighting not only for his own life, but for his master's life. He must win, or at least keep up till others interfered. He looked every minute for someone to come into the anteroom; someone to witness this unfair struggle.

The two gleaming steels in front of him seemed to multiply like the spokes of a wheel; they

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radiated from surrounding darkness like streaks of luminous lightning, until suddenly he was conscious that one forked flash fell upon him, and then there roared in his ears the noise of a thousand thunders, while a relentless force was hurling him on through the void of infinite space.

On seeing their victim fall, Neveu bethought him to summon help. The guardsmen from the corridors quickly assembled in a questioning, excited group around the dying man. For a few moments his lips moved, but they could not hear what he said and none ever knew that with his last breath he was thinking of his master, and begging them to send for the Marquise.

The two gentlemen had become considerably sobered by this time and could explain the affair with intelligence: Treon and Lemoyne had quarreled; Lemoyne threw a wine bottle at Treon and then swords were drawn; Treon, although unsteady with wine and having all the odds against him, had come off victor.

"Et voilà tout!" Neveu added with a shrug.

No one suggested sending the news to Madame Pompadour. It would be folly to disturb her because of a quarrel in the ante-room. Such

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disturbances had often occurred before, with equally tragic results. She might be summoned to Bellevue half a dozen times a year if called for every duel that took place on her grounds.

Not knowing whence he came nor who were his friends, they buried Lemoyne with proper respect in a quiet spot near Meudon. His coming to the château had been shrouded in mystery, and equally obscure was his exit.

The keeper of the Boudoir passed away unshrived, unwept, unknown. They who had coveted his title had quickly deprived him of it; he was keeper now of a little room six feet beneath the ground.

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Chapter XIV

"I, THE KING, HAVE SPOKEN"

THE Lit de justice was all that pomp and gold could make it. Rank, station, lineage, estate, were measured and marked with the accuracy of notches on a yard-stick: every title in its place, every shade of distinction manifest, from the highest to the lowest.

In the streets the common people stood thick upon the curb; a curious-eyed, shoulder-shrugging crowd, while above in the windows and balconies were those that looked down on the rabble — looked down in more senses than one. All were watching for the royal retinue. The guardsmen at the doors of the Parliament building wore their red uniforms with an air a shade superior to that of the soldiers in the street. Within the corridors the head ushers, coated in crimson, carried stiff backs as they fulfilled their duties. Beyond them, just inside the throne-room, were the heralds in pink and blue satin, long stockings,

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high heels, slashed doublet, and feathers, carrying gold-emblazoned purple banners. Then, lining the marble walls, followed row upon row of parliamentary dignitaries; the highest officers of each department — none of the lesser lights — for it would have required space for nine thousand souls, had the entire body been admitted. The Parliament of France included not only the law-makers, but also the law-enforcers; all the legal paraphernalia of the nation. But the Lit de justice paraded only the *Superior* Commissioners, the *Leading* Scribes, the *Grand* Secretaries, the *Premier* Officers of the Chamber of Accounts, the *Masters* of Requests, the *First* Recorders, the *Chief* Counsellors, the *General* Advocates, the *Honorary* Judges — these last in red velvet robes and ermine — fifty of them. Other functionaries in voluminous gowns of black velvet, gold-trimmed, were also in line — a hundred strong — while satin, damask, and taffeta served to dignify many a stoop-shouldered, near-sighted advocate of the law.

Ranged higher up on a dais approaching the throne was more color, more gold, jewels, blue-blood. Here were Princes of the House-Royal;

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the Prévôt de Paris, clad in silver-embroidered purple, and carrying a massive white baton; the Marshals of France; the Captains of the King's Body-guard, rigid in gleaming armour; and the Presidents of the Parliament, white-wigged and sumptuous in satin.

But all this magnificence paled before the splendour of royalty.

Louis, announced by his trumpeters, escorted by his brilliant body-guard, his train-bearers, his ministers, entered by the special portal of the King.

"Vive le Roi!" shouted the populace without and the multitude within.

Amid cries of — "Long live the King!" — blaring bugles and waving oriflammes, Louis mounted his canopied throne. He carried himself with a high head, an ignoring eye, a commanding step. There, above all others, his ermine robe draped about him, Louis stood before his Parliament, exalted, solitary, unapproachable.

And this was all as it should be when a king holds a Lit de justice; asserts his divine right to make a proclamation that none of his hearers approves of, but every one must obey. No dissent-

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ing voice may be raised when the Sovereign of France, from his throne at a Lit de justice, reads forth his ultimatum and closes with the august words:

"*Such are my orders. — I, the King, have spoken.*"

Again the banners waved, the trumpets sounded and Louis made his royal exit. But there were now no cries of "Vive le Roi!" Even beyond the doors the people quickly caught the feeling of the Parliament, and Louis' coach passed along the streets amid a row of silent onlookers. He well knew that behind his back and out of hearing the crowds were seething with discussion.

Told from door to door, the news rolled up one street and down the next, kicked along like a ball, accumulating the dirt of disapproval.

"The King has ordered the Parliament to be *silent upon all questions of religion!*"

This decree thrust among the people aroused a buzzing excitement, like a stick shoved into a bee-hive. Agitated crowds swarmed the avenues and filled the cafés. Arguments started up at every corner; the air was vibrant with a hum of words.

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"Sacre! the Church has the day!"

"The Parliament is blind-folded, tongue-tied, and hand-cuffed!"

It was the old Jesuit-Jansenist quarrel simmered down to a war between the Church and the Parliament, for the Church was ruled entirely by Jesuits, and the Parliament was Jansenist to a man. The King between them, like a poor pestered parent, must needs slap first one then the other. He would gladly disown them both if he dared, but a King without a parliament to uphold him, and a church to forgive him, would cast a lean shadow as he walked.

"Oh Lord! the poor King!" exclaimed one boulevardier to his neighbour at table in a café. "He needs the Church to save his soul, and the Parliament to save his kingdom! He is afraid to offend either body, and yet must side with one or the other!"

The speaker shrugged his shoulder, touched a wine-glass to his lips, and added:

"This whole Jansenist-Jesuit business is a boiling pot of contention: Louis thinks today he has fitted on a lid that will keep the steam from burning him, but it is my guess that he still will

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be driven to blow on his fingers and dance around because the mixture is too hot."

While talk of this sort ran high from one end of Paris to the other, Louis, disgusted with the day's proceedings, was seeking diversion in his own fashion, and according to the way of his *valet de chambre*, Lebel.

This celebrated serving-man, after removing the King's *cordon bleu* and other evidences of rank, had enveloped him in a dark cloak and then the two, unrecognised, or at least unchallenged, had made their way out of the Louvre, through a little door of the *porte-cochère* and thence upon a route known only to Lebel, who arranged all of Louis' sub-rosa escapades.

Lebel it was who carried messages back and forth from incognita ladies. Lebel, only Lebel, could be relied upon as a go-between in the King's underhand amours.

Lebel, the Silent, knew more of the King's tastes and pastimes than history can ever reveal. "Lebel" was a name to conjure with, a veritable Mephistopheles, whose fame now goes side by side with that of the man he served.

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Chapter XV

THE CROWN PRICKS THE ROYAL HEAD

THE Lit de justice had been held on the 13th day of the month, and the outcome was decidedly unlucky. This fact, together with his recent experience at Bellevue, must have considerably strengthened the King's belief in signs and omens.

The next morning before his Majesty was out of bed he received the astounding news that the majority of members in the eight chambers of Parliament had sent in letters of resignation.

Louis the Fifteenth sat up in bed and said: "le Diable!" As the First Gentleman of the Royal Bedchamber handed to his Majesty his royal shirt, he swore again in more elaborate terms. As the Master of the Wardrobe handed to the Gentleman in Waiting, who, in turn, handed to the Chief Valet in attendance, the royal boots, Louis vowed by all the saints that every ingrate fool of the Parliament should be exiled. When

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the boots were on, he stamped them into place with another oath.

Never before had his Parliament thus openly defied him. He, — the King! — to be opposed by his own Parliament! It was a base indignity heaped upon Royalty!

Louis did not return to Versailles that day, nor the next, nor the next. Neither did Pompadour. She was invaluable to the King at this time.

Though she hated the edict he had given forth — hated any pronouncement that favoured the Jesuits — she knew that the King's supremacy must be maintained at all costs. She cared not a rap whether the Pope was infallible or not, but the King's divine right she never failed to assert. Divinely right he must be held; right in managing his Parliament, as — also — in maintaining his Pompadour!

So Louis, with her sustaining voice at his ear, signed an order of life-exile for every revolting member.

Then it was that the brainiest men of the nation, presidents, judges and advocates, appealed to the Pompadour, flocked to her palace in the

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Faubourg Saint Honoré, waited in her corridors, prayed for an audience, besought her to hear them, sent messengers, sent flowers, sent presents, long petitions, earnest letters; all in the hope that she would influence the King to modify the punishment he had meted out to them. Louis was inaccessible, but the Royal Favourite might be approached; not without ceremony, however, much bowing and use of fine words.

She received them with a hauteur that was withering; when she spoke it was to flash out words of indignation because they had dared to defy the King.

She had studied well into the matter, and could defend the Sovereign with telling arguments. Louis more than once had relied upon her as a mouth-piece. He was wise in doing so now.

Her tones rang with splendid scorn:

"Who are you, Messieurs of the Parliament, that you dare to resist your Ruler! Your predecessors under Louis XIV. did not presume to resign after the Lit de justice in 1673, though that event was more rigorous than this one. Do you deem yourselves of superior intellect to the members of former parliaments? I think if you will recall the

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names of those who filled your offices from the year 1673 to 1715, you will admit that France has never known a grander or more distinguished assemblage of magistrates. Or perhaps you do not consider Louis XV. so great a King as his grandfather?"

The contempt of her tone, the curl of her lip, had a scorching effect like quick fire.

"I assure you, Messieurs, your appeal for clemency is vain. His Majesty will never recall your exiled members. He is only too glad to see Parliament purged of its bad element." And so on.

After four days of the turmoil, she urged the King to return to Versailles.

"You but weary yourself here to no purpose. Let things rest for the present. Seek diversion tomorrow in the chase, and in the evening bring your Presence to Bellevue where, I promise you, the fête I have planned will afford you some taste of pleasure."

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Chapter XVI

A SOUL CONFRONTS ITSELF

HOW was it all this time with Romain de Vrie, imprisoned in the heart of a palace?

Five days of starving despair formed an experience that produced marked psychological effects. This courtier and lover, youthful, impulsive, aristocratic, found occasion to partake of that uncommon sacrament — communion with himself. Solitude had been the high priest that proffered to him the cup of trembling; memories slowly souring to the taste until at last he drank the dregs of bitterness; the sediment at the bottom of his self-seeking, soulless existence.

With growing wonder, doubt, and horror, he faced strange visions in that room alone. When first the fire died down and the flickering lamp burned out, Romain occupied himself with conjectures mingled with hope. Remnants of his breakfast stood within reach on the table, and by pushing on the wall he could move his couch far enough to lay hands on the water-bottle.

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At last the certainty of some disaster to Lemoyne was forced upon him: a hundred unanswered questions revolved within his mind.

Romain waited.

Twice the noontime marked itself in a timid ray of light upon the wall, but no one came. No slightest sound broke in upon the unearthly stillness of that locked room. He was left there to die like a rat in a hole, unable to move from his couch, penned in a room whose very existence was unknown: the horror of it drove him again and again to rapping and pounding in frantic frenzy upon the wall at his side. But never a sound penetrated the maddening stillness.

At last the Silence began to speak. Out of the shadowy corners a forbidding presence seemed to unfold itself: the Spirit of the Room, grim and reticent, came forward to add terror to his thoughts.

The dim shields and weapons on the wall had a horror all their own. Within a visored helmet above the hearth he seemed to see a dead face — leering at him.

But these phantoms were as nothing to those within. Spectres of shame, self-reproach, and

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sins long-forgotten, began to take form and chase across his mind. The folly of his love for Pompadour became a grinning demon that tore and bit at his heart. Delirious laughter shook his frame as he thought of his past blind fool-devotion.

He saw it all at last: the book lay open before him. She had wasted no love on him; she — who could chide and upbraid him with thoughts of her own possible danger when he had sacrificed position, name, friends, all but life to be near her; she — who could leave him, without a word of farewell, — to follow the King to Paris!

Romain's love turned to hate: his heart to a tangle of serpents.

Christ! — he could have sworn that helmet moved! He raised up on his elbow to look, but finally sank back exhausted.

Between pangs of hunger and pangs of doubt, time wore on; each minute the length of a horrible day, each hour like the stretch of eternity.

The next day he was weaker. He had less strength to rage: starvation can strangle passion.

He saw other visions now; saw himself as a boy, primped out in a page's finery, powdered, perfumed and curled. He saw himself waiting

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eagerly upon the royal favour, bowing, cringing, kneeling. Bah! the memory sickened him. He turned his face to the wall. The room was dark, but within his soul a strange clear light was rising. It showed him how selfish he had always been; self-willed, self-centred, self-satisfied, a fop, a fool, yes — a villain: he recalled how he had led poor Pierre into the way of death. Saints in Heaven! how he hated himself and loathed the life he had followed! Court splendour loomed up a ghastly mockery: he saw the hollowness of it all.

Then his thoughts grew confused: he could not untangle them. He believed he was dreaming: it was all a horrible nightmare. He shrieked aloud: his cry was swallowed by the monster Silence.

Then he listened in frenzied terror — he imagined he heard a mocking voice from within that iron-bound helmet!

He sank into unconsciousness, but awoke again only to renew the round of anguishing thoughts. In his calmer moments he tried to pray: he realised that death was near. He thought of the mystery beyond. Was there a God in Heaven? Was there a Heaven at all? And, — Oh! — Omnipotent

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Powers! was there, perhaps, a hell? He groaned, he sobbed, he clenched his hands and teeth, tore at his hair, rent his garments, and writhed in an agony of fear for his soul. He cried aloud for mercy. All his life was a sin as he saw it now. The thought of Pierre — the victim of his self-will and folly — made him feel like a murderer. He moaned with weakening voice, and in demented moments chattered stray words of the Pater Noster:

" — debita nostra," — "libera nos a malo".

Again there were lucid intervals when he vaguely felt that it mattered not whether he awoke in this world or the next. Hatred no longer lodged in his heart: he had forgotten how to be bitter. He felt at times a sort of delirious exaltation. But then again the huge despair would roll over him like a chaos.

In the fitful interims of consciousness, that gradually became less frequent, he thought it all out — the cause of his present plight: the King had planned this torturing death for him; it was the Royal pleasure that he should perish in Pompadour's palace. He doubted not that Lemoyne had been restrained from returning.

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Thus Romain reasoned until again delirium, taking the form of Mercy, whirled him away from the fangs of Remorse.

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Chapter XVII

A FÊTE AT BELLEVUE

MANY fêtes had been given at Bellevue during the ten years of that château's fame, but no two had been alike. The ingenuity of Madame Pompadour made each one a surprise. The pleasure of the King was the motive in all her fancies: Louis XV. had a nature which could be enlivened only by startling occurrences. If he knew beforehand what was to happen his blasé state of mind robbed the affair of all real interest. It was necessery to surprise him. Otherwise an evening would be dull. Louis had a veritable passion for the unusual and startling.

And so on the evening of the 18th the guests who alighted from their noisy equipages at the grand entrance to the château, aglow with burning torches and thousands of candles, knew not what the evening had in store.

"But we are certain of meeting wit and wisdom, beauty and blue-blood," remarked Count Kaunitz, the famous Austrian Ambassador, as he ascended the broad stairs lined with liveried lacqueys. He

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was addressing a compatriot at his side who was a stranger to Bellevue and the ways of its owner.

Count Kaunitz and his suite formed a noticeable group. The Austrian diplomat was as famous for his fastidious dress as for his elegant bearing and brilliant intellect. Diamond-studded buttons, bullion clasps and a weight of Russian sable adorned the elaborate lilac satin costume he wore that night. His companion, a prince of Hungary, was arrayed with a tiger-skin cape, gold-fringed and corded. All eyes were upon them as they joined the splendid assemblage gathered in the main salon awaiting the entrance of the Pompadour.

"Who is the little man with the Austrian Peacock?" asked Madame de Mirapoix, sotto-voce, of the Duchesse de Grammont, who at the moment was slyly observing the hang of her Watteau plait. Without waiting for the requested information Madame de Mirapoix pursued the subject of Count Kaunitz.

"Do you know," she said, "I have heard that to powder his hair he runs up and down the room while four valets sprinkle the air from puff-balls!"

A moment later all eyes were turned upon the ceremonious entrance of the Grande Marquise.

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"Mon Dieu! but she is radiant tonight! — all in shimmering white!" Madame de Mirapoix was still addressing her friend the Duchess: "Madame de Coislin in her crimson costume may as well say adieu and go home!"

Madame de Coislin was one of the numerous pretty women who had been encouraged by Madame Pompadour's enemies (notably the Prime Minister) in efforts to supplant the reigning Favourite.

The Duchesse de Grammont confidentially announced her opinion that this affair between the King and la Coislin had gone far enough to be serious.

"Don't you believe it," was the prompt retort. "The Marquise has no need to tremble. She did well to invite her rival. Look at them now side by side: the Pompadour — a pearl! the Coislin — a cornelian!"

A fanfare of trumpets announced the arrival of the King.

"His Majesty looks bored to begin with!" commented the irrepressible De Mirapoix — this time to the Abbé de Bernis.

"Trust the Marquise to dissipate that cloud."

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And indeed Louis' first glance at the Pompadour showed surprised admiration. He walked at her side to the supper-room and did not notice Madame de Coislin as they passed.

In the superb dining-hall a surprise was in waiting. The four walls were covered with a solid mass of roses, myriads of them, in every shade, and the air was heavy with a soft perfume. Such a rose-bower in winter was a source of the greatest amazement.

"By what magic has she summoned southern Italy to Bellevue?"

"A Fête des Fleurs in December!"

"A Midsummer-Night's Dream!"

The King reached out his hand to pluck one of the flowers, and as he touched it Madame Pompadour exclaimed:

"Behold! his Majesty's lightest touch has made the flower imperishable!"

And this was apparently true, for that flower and every other was of Sèvres porcelain; each one a work of art.

As the stupendous prodigality of the display was comprehended — the enormity of the achievement, for it was a new accomplishment in cer-

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amics,— comments of excited wonder and admiration arose from all sides. The customary reserve of court functions broke away. Astonishment ploughed through the frozen crust of etiquette: animation superseded ennui.

Madame Pompadour's fête was a success.

The King drank to her health: "Thanks to your efforts, Madame, the fame of Sèvres is now supreme. Here's to—la Princesse Porcelaine!"

The Austrian Ambassador explained to his friend: "They say she works in the laboratories and has made some discoveries of real worth to Sèvres. She is a wonderful woman: with one hand she is shaping a treaty, with the other she fashions a vase!"

But amid all this spoken praise of the Pompadour lurked some thoughts of another kind. The Prime Minister, always invited though always detested, growled under his breath:

"A Porcelain Princess — in a house of glass!"

He could almost hear the crash that would come if the rabble should begin throwing stones. Her extravagance boiled in his blood. He knew too much about the nation's exchequer to look on calmly at such impoverishing expenditures.

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"The lily-faced leech!" A string of opprobrious epithets caught in his teeth.

Other toasts were proclaimed and lightly quaffed as eye met eye and glass touched glass. Laughter and jest mingled with the sound of splashing fountains, the tones of cello, harp, violin and flute.

Later in the evening the music-room was thrown open, and here the great organ, just completed, was played on for the first time. The listeners in graceful groups upon satin-covered divans, beside and behind the more elaborate one set apart for the King, formed a picture of impressive elegance. Feathered fans were languidly swaying while Beauty's eyes glanced upward to admiring cavaliers. The polished floors reflected high-heeled slippers and buckled shoes, while mirrors multiplied the medley of brocaded silks, powdered hair and resplendent jewels.

Madame Pompadour sat near the King; a veritable left-hand Queen. It was a triumphant hour for the Favourite. She felt her power, and knew that she outshone her red-robed rival as the lily does the peony. She knew too that the King had been captivated.

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And yet the Pompadour was conscious of an under-lying apprehension which weighed upon her and could not be cast off: a nameless foreboding which at first she could not explain to herself. But suddenly she realised what troubled her. It was Romain de Vrie! She had literally forgotten his existence until now! She had returned very late from Paris, barely in time to dress for the evening's festivity. A strange presentiment of evil hung over her: probably for no other reason than the consciousness that the King and Romain were for the time-being under the same roof. She wished she had seen Lemoyne to urge him to caution: she longed for the evening to be over.

It was well after midnight when the King signified his intention to leave. Accompanied by his brilliant escort — the Master of Ceremonies with his golden staff pushing ahead, crying: "Way for the King!" — Louis made an imposing exit. He moved slowly forward, bowing slightly to the line of courtiers on either side, exchanging a word here and there: a mark of distinction coveted by all.

Near the main entrance of the château, the

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King suddenly stopped and dismissed most of his retinue; explaining that he had yet a matter of importance to discuss with the Marquise.

His two equerries were requested to wait for him in one of the ante-rooms.

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Chapter XVIII

THE WALLS HAVE TONGUES

LOUIS made his way by a small, private staircase to Madame Pompadour's boudoir. Seating himself comfortably, he enjoyed the unusual sensation of being absolutely alone. Through the windows came sounds of departing guests; the champing of horses, the closing of carriage doors, the shouts of postillions and the running of torch-bearers.

Louis restfully observed the familiar furnishings, so tasteful and artistic as to be always interesting. On the walls were the most recent paintings of David and Boucher, and mingled with these were engravings that had been etched and printed by the Marquise, who owned a small press and was an adept in its use. Drawings by her hand were strewn upon the writing-desk, which was of inlaid rose-wood and ivory with silver trimmings.

On the table near the King stood the famous

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jewel-framed miniature of Marie Thérèse, which that Queen had presented to the Pompadour previous to the signing of the Austrian treaty of alliance. Near this cherished souvenir, was the little bas-relief which the Marquise had carved upon onyx stone; an emblematic design of her own suggested by the Alliance. The King examined this minutely, mentally praising both it and its maker. Then something caused him to glance about the room with a puzzled expression, to rise from his chair — push it back — then sit down again.

A few minutes later he was again prompted to get up and listen; to walk the length of the room and back again.

Next, he opened the window and looked out upon the balcony as he had done on another occasion some days before. Returning to his chair he leaned over and looked under the table; a most unkingly proceeding.

But these peculiar manœuvres were presently discontinued when the door opened and Madame Pompadour entered, followed by Madame du Hausset who was receiving in her arms, fan, gloves, bracelets, and scent-bottle as the Marquise

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hastily tossed them to her, with a flutter of words and instructions, until suddenly the hostess perceived her visitor.

The last person in the world Madame Pompadour cared to see in her boudoir at that moment was Louis the Fifteenth of France!

But there he was, comfortably seated, and apparently nothing urgent had brought him. She mentally resigned herself to what might be a lengthy consultation, and assumed a cordiality she did not feel.

"We find ourselves unexpectedly honoured—," she began.

(It may be noted that together with the royal purple, Madame Pompadour had long since appropriated to herself the royal plural.)

"Has your Majesty been waiting long?"

"For the past half hour I have been serving here as Keeper of your Boudoir."

It was somewhat startling to hear the King use an appellation which throughout the evening had been more or less in Madame Pompadour's mind. She glanced up in quick surprise, but was reassured when he added:

"What recompense do I receive for the office?"

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"None at all, Sire," she answered lightly, "for Bellevue is already provided with a Keeper of the Boudoir! Is it not so, Du Hausset?"

This lady suddenly looked so solemn, that the Marquise unconsciously appended an extra "n'est-ce pas?" to her question, whereupon Madame du Hausset thought best to state facts.

"But he is dead, Madame. — Has no one told you?"

"Dead? who is dead?" Madame Pompadour questioned sharply.

"The new man, Madame; the Keeper of the Boudoir. He was killed: there was a quarrel at cards."

"When did this happen?" Madame Pompadour spoke with tones well-controlled but her face blanched visibly and signalled her agitation.

Madame du Hausset could not remember the exact time at once; she had to count up:

"This is Wednesday — yesterday Tuesday — we had the decorators on Monday; oh, yes, I remember now: it was the day after Madame left for Paris."

Five days! Madame Pompadour shuddered. She thought of De Vrie and his miserable plight.

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Then she thought of herself. She felt enmeshed in the situation; coiled about with danger. Blinding fear pictured the Count and the King together: to her distracted mind their meeting seemed immanent. She would have welcomed an earthquake — a revolution — anything to dislodge the King at that moment from Bellevue.

But a perverse Fate was ruling otherwise. Madame du Hausset suddenly became communicative, from a feeling of pride at being news-bearer to such august company.

"Do you know," she dribbled, in her eternally placid monotone, "it is the strangest thing — but since his death, in this part of the château, we have heard peculiar raps and sounds as though the place were haunted."

"What! another ghost!" the King sprang up with excitement. "I heard the sounds myself not long since: they puzzled me extremely."

Madame Pompadour clutched tensely the back of the chair she was leaning against. Then, commanding herself, she tried to appear at ease; to make light of the matter. But Louis interrupted:

"Let us listen; perchance we may hear the sounds again."

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It was in truth the hour for ghostly visitations. As they listened all was still within the château. The night was dark, and the illuminations had burned out: even in the boudoir the candles were melting. Not a sound disturbed the silence.

After several moments of fruitless suspense, the King asked Madame du Hausset if the knocking had been heard during the day as well as at night.

"It was heard this morning, Sire," she replied in hushed tones, "but listen! — hark!"

Madame Pompadour raised her head; the King, too, held his breath, for at this moment, distant but distinct, they heard a tapping on the wall; — a ghastly sound, like Death's own bony knuckle knocking for admission. The effect was blood-curdling, gruesome, uncanny; yet fraught with an indefinably human appeal that pierced to the heart.

Madame Pompadour for the moment forgot all caution:

"He is buried alive!"

"No, Madame, he is dead, I assure you, and buried some distance from here."

Madame du Hausset's undisturbed tones served to recall the Marquise to a realisation of the imperilling remark that had escaped her own lips.

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"Yes of course," she hastily acceded, (she could have hugged the good Du Hausset for her timely density!) "but this occurrence — so extraordinary — in my own château" —. The iron of determination suddenly sounded in her tones, "I must investigate at once, Sire. With your permission —"

It was a wild and futile effort: Louis made no move to go. Perhaps he did not even hear her; he had been thinking.

"I am wondering," his voice rang out impressively, "I am wondering if this may not be again the ghost of the Comte de Vrie?"

He hardly knew the import of his own words; they were merely suggested by a train of thought not yet followed out in his own mind. But bullets fired in the air may chance to hit the man who has hid in a tree. Madame Pompadour's overwrought nerves and troubled conscience made her hear in the King's words only the deepest sarcasm. She inferred that he knew more than he pretended and perhaps for this very reason had sought the present interview. The earth swayed beneath her.

"Who has told you? what do you know? do

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not blame me — I will yet explain all, I promise you, but not now — not tonight."

She multiplied words in any fashion that would give her time to think up some manner of myth by which to save her position. Her tones were hurried and betrayed her intense alarm.

Madame du Hausset, perceiving the impending cyclone, discreetly retired.

Louis, now thoroughly aroused to suspicion by the Marquise's own words and manner, and convinced that nothing supernatural appertained to the mysterious rapping, suddenly spoke severely:

"Explain to me at once, Madame, *the King commands!*"

Never before had she been addressed in this manner, but strange to say, his tone imparted to her a sudden calmness and clearness of vision. The two stood for a moment facing each other; Louis the Fifteenth of France and the imperious Marquise de Pompadour. Each had become suddenly defiant, suddenly determined.

Her answer came in tones clear and steady: she had weighed her words well.

"It is the Count de Vrie."

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"The Count de Vrie!" Perplexity, astonishment and anger were evident in the King's voice, but the Marquise did not blanch. Her tones continued firm as she added:

"Yes, the Count Romain de Vrie; he is not dead."

"Death and damnation! do you mean to tell me that man is still alive?"

"Yes."

"But did I not see him dead in the forest of St. Germain?"

"No — not the Count de Vrie."

"Mille tonnerre! whom *did* I see?"

"Another man, who greatly resembled him."

"Another man!" Louis paused in his vehemence and instead of further expletives, he became suddenly thoughtful, and tramped up and down the room.

Returning to the Marquise, he spoke with pervasive blandness as he pointed to a chair.

"Pray be seated, Madame. We will make ourselves comfortable, while you with your accustomed grace shall entertain me with a good story; a love story, I doubt not."

Madame Pompadour seated herself as requested.

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There was a deathly repose in her bearing that almost disconcerted the King as she repeated his words in quiet tones:

"Yes, — a love-story."

She looked at him fearlessly and spoke slowly. The course she had decided upon would require a most careful use of words. She must not stumble in her tale.

The King urged her on:

"Well, — begin. Once upon a time among the various lovers of Madame de Pompadour there was one Romain de Vrie; noted scoundrel, hypocrite, outcast. There is your introduction. Proceed, Madame."

With no shade of resentment, she answered, decisively:

"You mistake, Sire; he loves another."

The King smiled, and tossed his hand in deprecation.

"I am less interested, Madame, in these assertions than in some explanation of this noble gentleman's return to life! As for the rest, of course it would be clear to anyone that your various desperate efforts to save him are put forth only because he loves another!"

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"Your Majesty chooses to be sarcastic, but your words none the less correctly explain my position. I have tried to save the Count de Vrie for no other reason than because my sympathies were aroused toward the woman he loves, and because the excitement of his adventure somewhat enticed me."

Madame Pompadour then told how Romain had made use of a substitute, whose sudden death had brought about all these dire and unforeseen results.

"You see, Sire, I could not but admire his courage in risking so much to remain near the woman of his heart."

The King bowed gravely.

"My native truthfulness requires me to avow that only one woman in all France could accomplish such a conquest. In truth, I cannot blame the gallant Count, nor even wonder at his recklessness in allowing himself to be discovered by me in your boudoir!"

Madame Pompadour evinced a momentary trace of nervousness, but quickly regained her composure as she retorted:

"In my boudoir, yes; but not to see me. He

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is in love with my new protégée, Destine de Vârel, the young singer of St. Cyr whom you heard inquire about him that day we returned from the chase."

Surprised, Louis undoubtedly was, but far from being convinced. He thrummed with his fingers on the table, and nodded impatiently:

"Yes — I remember."

"I beg of you, Sire, to sheathe the blade of your distrust, I am speaking most truthfully when I assure you that my young protégée had been in my boudoir that day very shortly before your Majesty was announced."

This delightful oasis of truth in the arid expanse of fiction through which she was so painfully making her way, greatly strengthened and emboldened the Marquise. The bare branches of her story sprouted fresh flowers of fancy.

"Destine had already confided in me, and when I was also appealed to by the Count, it was natural that my sympathies should be aroused, although I upbraided him roundly for evading your order of banishment. Now, Sire, I humbly beseech you to forgive what deception I may seem to have practiced, and since you know all, let me persuade

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you to release not only myself, but also the Count de Vrie from your displeasure."

Madame Pompadour knew that in her pleading moods she was most attractive and well-nigh irresistible. So she continued her entreaty with courage and confidence.

"When you realise his present position, I am sure, Sire, you must be moved to pity. He is injured, sick, and helpless. I left him in care of my Keeper of the Boudoir. No one else knew of his presence in the château."

"Ah — I begin to understand," the King interrupted her. His voice was hard. He repeated his words, slowly:

"I begin to understand — your agitation. I see, too, what you meant by saying 'he is buried alive.' "

Louis paused a moment, thoughtfully, then continued; his eyes never leaving the Marquise.

"The mysterious rappings are also explained: the unfortunate Count has been knocking for assistance."

The Pompadour mutely nodded her head, but spoke no further word of persuasion. Louis resumed his ominous soliloquy:

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"And now I am to understand that Monsieur le Comte has undergone all these hardships because of his great love for a young protégée of yours!"

A dignified silence on the part of the Marquise was the only answer he received to this. She returned his gaze without the least wavering.

There was another short pause and then Louis announced politely:

"Your story has been a pleasing one, but I am obliged to state that it lacks the necessary proof."

Madame Pompadour was prepared for this. She at once assumed an air of outraged virtue, and without a word, noisily rang the little call-bell on her desk. Madame du Hausset promptly appeared.

"Bring Mademoiselle de Vârel here at once," was the imperious order, which the lady-in-waiting went immediately to fulfill.

Madame Pompadour then turned upon the King with a fine show of righteous wrath:

"Your Royal suspicions are almost beyond bearance. It is my misfortune to have loved a king; none other would dare so to treat me."

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She was pacing the floor with splendid fury. But there was something magnificent, too, in the King's anger. He suddenly unbottled the bitterest vial of his wrath; one which, for the past hour, had soured and seethed in his brain until at last it foamed over.

"What are my 'suspicions' as compared with your actions? You assist a condemned man to escape from your balcony by making me, Louis de Bourbon, King of France, ridiculous in his eyes; scaring me as one would a child — 'Boo! it is a ghost!' "

The King brought his fist down upon the table with such violence that the Marie Thérèse miniature was upset.

"Mordieu! Madame, it will take much graciousness on your part to make me forget that!"

The Pompadour, in lieu of any reply, flung herself upon the divan and shed some very genuine tears. The King was wiping his brow to cool off the heat of his anger, and it is hard to say what the outcome of this *scène-aux-larmes* might have been had not Madame du Hausset at this moment returned with Destine; as astonished a young person as ever was wakened

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from a sound sleep. She had not had time to arrange her hair, which was in a charming disorder of flowing curls. Her gown had been hastily donned and, being without the carefully crossed neckerchief, displayed, what seemed to Destine, an immodest expanse of throat and chest. She had wanted to rush back and remedy this, but Madame du Hausset would not hear of it.

On finding herself in the presence of the King, the young girl became as pretty a picture of blushing modesty as he had ever seen. Her appearance went far toward pacifying him, but the Pompadour had her best card yet to play. With convincing aplomb she turned to her protégée.

"I have been telling his Majesty your pretty story about the Count de Vrie. I wish you would show to his Majesty the lace handkerchief you cherish as a souvenir."

In dazed obedience Destine drew from her bosom the little token, which she untied from the blue ribbon and mutely handed to the King, who, after silently noting the embroidered name, respectfully returned it, while Madame Pompadour in triumphant repose let the little pantomime do its work.

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She had groped her way through a long, dark tunnel, but at last an opening was reached. The King showed by his manner that he could take no further exception to her tale.

The relief she felt was somewhat too evident:

"Your Majesty will, I am sure, no longer delay me in assisting my unfortunate prisoner." With a wave of the hand she signified dismissal to Destine and Madame du Hausset.

But the King spoke up quickly; his remark landing like a boulder in her path.

"By all means send Mademoiselle de Vârel to him at once."

Destine, who was just leaving the room, turned at the mention of her name, and Madame Pompadour, as was usual when at her wit's end, talked very rapidly and filled the air with nervous animation.

"But I have not yet told her of his illness, — she will be greatly shocked. And besides, I should have to go with her in any case, as she is new to the château and would not know the way. If Your Majesty will excuse me —."

The strain of this entire interview with the King had so worn upon Madame Pompadour's

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nerves, that she blindly sought any means to end it.

But Louis, not through with the matter, was purposely persistent:

"Send your lady-in-waiting."

"But she too —," the Pompadour caught herself, but Louis finished the sentence for her.

" — does not know the way. Am I not correct in my surmise?"

New anger blazed up in his face as, without waiting for an answer, he exclaimed vehemently:

"It is as I supposed; the secret-chamber, sacred heretofore to my knowledge alone, has been ruthlessly thrown open."

This fresh discovery of outrage to Royalty made him doubly indignant. He again paced the floor and spoke rapidly.

"By all means, let us apprise Madame du Hausset and all the world of its construction."

He himself handed to that lady a lighted candelabrum and then going directly to the proper panel he opened it with unerring memory.

"You go down this passage-way, Madame, until met by another panel which opens as this one does. Then you follow a little stairway that

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leads directly to the hidden room; the precious secret-chamber of Bellevue, reserved for use of the French King in some pressing State emergency!"

He laughed in evil manner at his own sarcasm.

Madame Pompadour hurriedly handed a candle to Destine; mutely motioning her and Madame du Hausset to proceed at once.

The lady-in-waiting was tolerably well-informed as to the purpose and destination toward which she was headed, for by dint of careful listening outside of the door, she had lost very little of the recent animated scene in the boudoir. Destine, however, was in absolute ignorance as to why and wherefore she was proceeding through this panelled passageway of Bellevue at this unhallowed hour of the night. But she was never one to resist the destiny that shaped her path, and though at this point the path was most peculiar, she followed without fear.

After they had left the room, Madame Pompadour stood apathetically leaning against the wall, her arm still outstretched as it had been in closing the panel. The King had seated himself again and with apparent preoccupation was replacing

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the Austrian miniature. His anger was still evident. It centred now upon the Marquise, as she well knew, and with this consciousness there loomed up before her, a vision of the beautiful Madame de Coislin installed in her place.

A momentary dizziness passed over the Marquise. Then despair seemed to clarify her thoughts. She saw everything clearly: she saw that Louis would never forgive her; saw herself bereft of all that she prized; power, name, fame, friends, wealth, health and beauty. She saw Madame de Coislin enjoying the homage of all the diplomats of Europe. She saw the Prime Minister triumphant and all her enemies exultant. The end had come! Her days of glory were over! Louis would never forgive or forget.

Presently she began to speak, and her words came slowly, as though she found it an effort to enunciate. Her arm fell to her side, but beyond this she did not move.

"I realise it now fully; the enormity of my offence." Something in the tone of her voice caused Louis to look up: it was so different, so exceedingly strange. It was low, but so vibrant that everything in the room seemed to respond to

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its timbre. It sounded a depth of feeling entirely new and unexpected. There was a gravity and tenderness to these unfamiliar tones that was startling in their effect upon the King. Their carrying power made them penetrate to undiscovered recesses in his heart. Louis listened in amazement. The speech seemed utterly foreign to the Marquise. He could hardly dismiss the impression that some one else was addressing him or, rather, soliloquising.

"It did not occur to me before — the indignity to his Majesty — but now I understand. What I have done is unpardonable."

The heart-weary words continued, and always in that astonishing voice. Louis observed the speaker with more and more interest. Her appearance, too, seemed to have undergone a change. She had never stood like that before; her head leaning over slightly to one side, and her shoulders simply hanging. He could trace distinctly the outline of her collar-bone. He had never noticed before how slight she was, and how frail. She was pale from the excitement of the past hour; her skin was as white as the satin of her gown, whose heavy folds coiled about her feet, suggesting a

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pedestal, and adding to the statue-like effect of her pose. She was delicately, exquisitely beautiful.

Louis was puzzled. He could hardly recognise in this slender, sorrowful, gentle figure, the magnificent Marquise; always brilliant, regal and superb.

Where had gone her buoyant voice of command, her wonted words of repartee?

"All is lost!" she was saying to herself, softly, over and over, "Alexandrine gone, Louis gone —"

Could this still be the wonderful Pompadour?

Louis did not analyse the change, but in point of fact, what he now saw was the *real* Pompadour — the genuine woman — her very self revealed to him for the first time. She was no longer acting a part. She was not posing now, not speaking for effect.

But the very lack of such effort lent to her a new charm; an appealing charm, that thrilled Louis strangely; it touched the natural heart of the man. She seemed an embodiment of Despair idealised: her soul stood unclothed of all dissembling.

Moved with real pity, and love in its higher sense, Louis walked over to her side and gently took her hand in his.

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"Diane!"—that name always thrilled her, he alone had ever used it. Their eyes slowly met as he spoke, and at that moment Truth looked from one to the other.

"Diane," he repeated, "come back to Versailles."

As one very tired, and hardly understanding, she questioned:

"To Versailles?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Soon."

Still she questioned, with that quiet, strange voice that so affected him.

"But — the people?"

(To quiet public opinion, she had some months before given up her apartment at Versailles.)

"The people will say nothing now," Louis announced, "for the Queen has acceded to my request that you be installed as her lady-in-waiting. It was to tell you this news that I came up here this evening to your boudoir."

Lady-in-waiting to the Queen! Long and earnestly had Madame Pompadour sought for this position. At last it was hers! She could hold her head high now before her most adverse

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critics. The Queen had sanctioned her residence in the palace! Many a time Madame Pompadour had pictured to herself the unbounded joy and exhilaration she would feel if ever such news came to her. But now she received it quietly. Her mood of despair had been so deep it could not change at once.

"I will come," was all that she said, but the mist in her eyes and the tremulous curve of her lip told the King of her gratitude.

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Chapter XIX

NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON

AFTER much difficulty in finding the second panel and pushing it open, Destine and Madame du Hausset at last made their way into the hidden room of Bellevue.

A heart-rending sight met their gaze. When the uncertain light of their candles first revealed that wan figure with the torn shirt, the disordered hair, the emaciated face, the half-grown beard and — most pitiful of all — the bandaged leg still securely bound to the couch, Destine drew back in terror.

"Who is it?" she whispered, nervously.

"The Count de Vrie," hurriedly replied Madame du Hausset as she placed the candle on the table.

Destine grasped her arm: the girl was trembling so that Madame du Hausset looked up in surprise.

"Did you say '*De Vrie*'?"

Destine could hardly utter the words; something seemed to close her throat.

"I thought he was dead!" she added in a hollow whisper.

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"So did I, — but he's not," was the laconic answer, "not quite, — poor man."

And then Madame du Hausset flew to work. She chafed the unconscious man's hands, and administered smelling salts, till he partly opened his eyes with the troubled look of a wandering mind. Then she hastened to build a fire from wood on the hearth, for the room was bitterly cold. The gaunt figure on the couch was immobile and insensible.

"I must summon Dr. Quesnay," Madame du Hausset announced and, leaving Destine, went at once to seek the Doctor in his apartment in the château.

Standing there with the Count de Vrie before her haggard and helpless, Destine's face grew white as his, her lips quivered, her hands were cold, her heart hammered at her side. Then, gradually, a flush of youth and gladness stole upon her; a still consciousness of great joy. She did not move; she watched him with the awe and glory of one who beholds a miracle. He was alive! The Count de Vrie! Alive! She listened to his breathing; her eyes never left his face. In spite of his shaggy beard and wan,

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drawn features, he was still to her the splendid, superb cavalier.

Her prayer had been answered! He had come to her again!

Destine at that moment could have fallen to her knees and shouted hosannas, in a turbulent ecstacy of gratitude; but the wonder of it held her heart. She was swept by a whirl of memories — the woods of Bouviers, the stranger, the chapel of St. Cyr, Bellevue. For one overaweing instant she seemed to catch a luminous glimpse of the mystical, unseen shaping of events; the labyrinth of fate disclosed its devious paths. Then again — the hour, the night, the room, the loneliness — bewildered her like the maze of a dream.

Madame du Hausset soon returned with Dr. Quesnay and his valet. They found the sick man in an alarming condition of fever and delirium. The two women were ordered to their rooms, while the Doctor and his attendant took charge of the patient for the night.

They worked hard, those two: they bled and bandaged and poulticed poor De Vrie until he was apparently weaker than ever; but as they

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also gave him food and drink, his case was not hopeless.

The next morning Destine and Madame du Hausset were allowed to do a share of the nursing.

There followed several days of watching and uncertainty as to the outcome, but finally the fever gave way.

Romain after this was so exhausted he could only glance wearily at those about him, conscious of their presence but too feeble to ask questions or even wonder why they cared for him. But it was not long before his strength began to return and he gained some semblance to his former self.

He had long talks alone with Madame du Hausset. When he learned of poor Lemoyne's fate he very nearly had a relapse. Du Hausset told him also of Madame Pompadour's return to Versailles. But this affected him not at all. The name that once had charmed his ear like the chimes of paradise had become unmeaning as the tinkling bells on a jester's cap. The Pompadour was to him now as though she never had been: she who had seemed heretofore the most prominent figure on the canvas of life had suddenly faded away. She had no place in his heart, no place in

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his life, not even a niche in his thoughts. When her name was mentioned he recalled her, of course, but no surging emotion trailed after the memory: he could think of her with never a throb, either of love or of hate.

He wondered himself at this change: he could not analyse what had happened. He did not know that character is sometimes like the shadow on the photographer's film — undiscernible until the "dark room" develops it. Baptised in the acid of sharp, biting agony, he had emerged a new being. His soul had passed through a chrysalis state; in the tomb-like silence it had grown. Some experiences can whiten the soul in a night.

Romain was unaware of the new spirit within him. He only knew that he listened unmoved when Du Hausset talked of the Pompadour. But there were some matters she talked about that affected him keenly. Aside from the heart-gripping news of Lemoyne's death, there was another piece of information that left him deeply thoughtful, silent, sad.

He spoke hardly at all to Destine. She had become strangely shy and deferential since he looked at her with conscious eyes. She saw

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always the halo of nobility about him, and could not get over a feeling of awe: it was as though she watched at an altar.

Madame du Hausset told him that Destine was a protégée of the Marquise. It puzzled him at first — the sight of this brown-eyed, girlish face; it called up a memory he could not place, and a place he could not remember. But one day the floating fabrics of the vision flew together. He asked Destine abruptly: "Do you sing?"

She answered, "Yes." Then he knew why her face was familiar; the song in the forest came back to him. But he said no more that day. He looked at her, however; watched her when she did not know it.

He liked the pretty ways she had of putting things in their places, straightening the mat on the table, ordering the cups and bottles in a soldierly row, grouping the glasses in front, and standing the water-bottle, like a commanding general, exactly in the centre.

She never was with him long; an hour, it might be, when Madame du Hausset was taking a nap.

He began to watch for the time: was glad when he detected the Madame suppressing a yawn.

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After she left, there would be heard a light step on the stair, a gentle opening of the panel, and then — a sense of brightness in the room.

"Bon jour, Monsieur," Destine always said.

"Bon jour, Mademoiselle," said he, and then — nothing more for perhaps an hour, unless there was medicine to give, or the time for his broth came around. She always found ways to busy herself, what with stirring the fire, piling on wood, dusting the chimney-place and keeping the room in order. As she moved about he watched the lithe sway of her figure, and admired her plain brown convent costume, the little white apron and neckerchief. Her hair, the same shade as her dress, was braided and wreathed around her head, but at either side stray locks escaped and coiled about her ears like brown sea-weed entwining a pair of curved pink shells.

Her naturalness refreshed him: it rested his eyes to look upon her unpowdered hair, her unrouged face and, above all, her unforced smile. She gradually grew to symbolise for him all that his past life had lacked; simplicity, purity, sincerity, faith, religion, contentment.

Sometimes when he was sleeping, or she thought

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he was, he would look up suddenly and find her at his side watching over him with a thoughtful sweet expression of deep-souled tenderness.

Their eyes would meet for a moment, then hers would droop, turn shyly away, and never glance toward him again that day.

He was always needing things done that he never thought of when Du Hausset was there; a drink of water, an extra coverlet, or a different angle to his pillow. Sometimes their hands accidentally would touch; it was as though a flame leaped from one to the other. He would turn his face to the wall and sigh. He had seen the flush on her cheek, he felt his own heart beating wildly, but he did not speak; he only sighed and tried to think of other things — of Lemoyne, Pierre — of death.

But the next day always found him watching again for Du Hausset to yawn and to say that she must go.

Once he asked Destine to sing for him; she did so without a word or question; sang softly, thoughtfully — the song she had sung in the forest. It plunged him into memories and remorse: he lived it all over again, the day, the

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scene, his thoughts at that time. Tears filled his eyes. When she had finished he said, "Thank you," but nothing more; while she, poor dear, was grieved because he had not recognised the song.

Another day Destine, very bravely, very simply, tried to return the handkerchief she had treasured so long.

He looked at it, heard through her little speech of explanation, then suddenly — without taking it — he clasped her two hands with a grip of iron, crushed them in his: all weakness seemed to have left him. He looked, for one long moment, straight into her eyes, then — as though impelled by a painful thought, some cruel necessity — he turned away, relaxed his hands, and told her in husky tones to keep the handkerchief: "Keep it to remember me by."

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Chapter XX

THE SHADOW OF THE BASTILLE

AS the days went by, the invalid gained rapidly in strength but not in spirits. Destine noted this with surprise and a tinge of disappointment.

He had never again sought to clasp her hand, or to renew the spirit of that one electric moment.

But a day at last came when he addressed her in tones that were at least different from those he commonly used. He seemed to have something on his mind to say, but he spoke very quietly, gently.

She had been arranging some flowers in the room gliding about in her quiet way; her very presence imparting sweet beauty to the grim surroundings.

He thanked her for the flowers and then said:

"Mademoiselle, you are too kind to me: you make it harder for me to leave."

"Shall that be soon, Monsieur?" she asked, with telltale alarm.

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"Much sooner than I would wish. But I have been too long a guest of Madame de Pompadour: the King now wishes to play the host."

"The King — is he a friend of yours?" his listener questioned, wonderingly.

Romain smiled enigmatically.

"So good a friend, Mademoiselle, that he would be unhappy not to keep me very close. His guard, which already awaits me at these gates, will give me royal escort to an apartment his Majesty keeps reserved for me. But it is not of the King or myself that I wish now to speak, but of you, Mademoiselle. You are young, and strangely situated here."

He paused a moment, as though troubled to find the right words, then he continued:

"Your presence has greatly cheered and comforted me in my unlucky sojourn at Bellevue, but take it not amiss, Mademoiselle, if I say that it would gladden me more to think of you as still at St. Cyr. You are as out of place here as a lark in a hawk's nest."

His tones were deep with earnestness and a strong under-current of feeling, which he tried to hide from her. She must not know how much he

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cared. His life was blotted out from the world: he must erase it, too, from her memory. This seemed to him a duty. The task was a bitter one, but he went at it bravely.

"In later years you may understand what I now am saying. I am interested in you, as a man may be in a child — for you are little more than that."

A cruel speech — and he knew it. The effort to make it had nigh strangled his heart, and now when he saw the expression of pain that crept into her glorious eyes, he bit his lips with tight teeth to conceal the battle of his emotions.

He was silent a long time; she almost thought he was not going to speak again. It was a tense moment; his face tortured white, his eyes drinking in her features as though to quench an endless thirst.

Suddenly he spoke in forced, quick tones; each one a choking ejaculation.

"Go back to St. Cyr. Forget me! Drop me out of your life! Don't think of me again. Destroy the handkerchief you have! Don't — don't even pray for me! Go! — Forget me!"

With eyes brimming over, Destine hastened out

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of the room. The thick panelled door closed behind her; had it not done so she might have heard the heavy sobs of a strong man alone with sorrow.

He loved her: all his being writhed with the longing to tell her. How the hard edge of the days to come would have been softened by the thought that she knew of his love, that she prayed for him night and morning, that she saw him in her dreams! But this was not for him. He had no right to blight her young life with thoughts of a hopeless love.

Strange transformation — this — in one who had always deemed it fair to proffer a kiss as lightly as he would pick up a lady's fan. Had Romain given the matter a thought, he would hardly have recognised himself.

But his thoughts now were only of her, the light in her eyes, the thrill of her voice, the joy, the brightness, the something unwordable that shone in her face, purity, prayer, hopefulness, he could not tell what it was, but he knew that it made him love her — love her so well that, for her sake, he had looked in her eyes and denied it.

Rushing on to her room, where tears and heart-

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ache might be indulged in, Destine ran against Madame du Hausset.

"A lady-in-waiting should never be in haste," that lady admonished kindly. "Court etiquette precludes hurry. But why are you crying?" she added, on seeing a tear furtively wiped away.

Destine, at all times strictly truthful, confessed that she was sad because the Count de Vrie was obliged soon to leave them.

"He says the King has sent for him, and they only wait until he is sufficiently recovered."

To Destine's surprise, Madame du Hausset herself was very nearly in tears.

"Poor man! So he has told you! I did not intend to let you know. But it is only too true: the King's guard surround the entire palace: there is no escape. Poor man! It is terrible! He will fare very ill—that I know—in the Bastille."

Destine gasped:

"The Bastille! Madame, what do you say?"

Madame du Hausset looked up in surprise.

"I thought he had told you?"

"Not the Bastille!" Destine shuddered and for a moment covered her face with her hands. "He told me the King had prepared an apartment

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for him—did he mean the Bastille? Mother of God! — the Bastille!"

To Destine there was no word in existence so terrible, so dread-inspiring as the "Bastille." Her own grandfather had died within its drear walls, and all her childhood had been terrified by the tales her mother told of the suffering within that fortress, of the lingering death it held for all prisoners. She was too deeply shocked for tears. With dry-eyed terror she tried to command her thoughts, while Madame du Hausset explained further.

"Yes—yes, in four days, at most, he goes to the Bastille. The King is hugely offended at him."

"What has he done? Why is the King so incensed against him? Do you know the reason?"

Madame du Hausset said "Yes," before she thought.

"Then you will tell me — I beg of you, Madame, do tell me what he has done."

Destine pleaded earnestly.

"But I dare not tell you, Mademoiselle: it may be a state secret."

"Oh — was it treason?"

"No, no, — not that. But you really must not

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ask me, child. Come with me into the boudoir: sit down, you are pale. I fear you will faint."

She led the way into the room, Destine following.

"Madame, you don't mean to say — it was murder?"

"No, no, — of course not. Here, rest yourself on this divan."

Destine obeyed to the extent of sitting down, but she did not lean back. She was quite unconscious of the persistency of her questions.

"Did he himself tell you what it was?"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Du Hausset, "I overheard him tell the Marquise; I was sitting in the little closet back of the alcove."

This closet was a favourite retreat for Madame du Hausset when Pompadour received important guests. No qualms of conscience disturbed the listener; she looked upon it as a privilege that went with her position. But the ethics of this matter were lost upon Destine, who in her eagerness to learn more leaned forward in her chair as she asked quickly:

"Was this before I came here?"

"No; he called on the Marquise the very day you arrived."

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"But the Marquise had told me he was dead!"

Madame du Hausset was unguarded in her rejoinder:

"Well, you see, everyone thought so, even the King: he is furious now because he was fooled."

Having told thus much, the speaker relented and, in response to the girl's further pleading, told all of the strange story as she had heard it.

"And for this he must go to the Bastille! Oh Madame, what a terrible fate!"

Destine shivered as she spoke, but added anxiously:

"Can we do nothing to save him? Let us go to the Marquise: perhaps she can help him."

Madame du Hausset replied promptly:

"My dear child, Madame Pompadour has already defied his Majesty to the limit, by giving shelter to the Count in the first place."

"But let us try, anyway. Perhaps she can think of some method. Let me go to her."

"It is not to be thought of. I would not presume either to send you or go myself to the royal palace without being summoned. And besides, it can do no good for, as everyone knows, when Louis of France says 'à la Bastille,' to the Bastille one goes."

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There was a moment's silence. Destine was thoughtful but she said nothing more. Madame du Hausset presently arose, and advised Destine to take a nap.

"Try to rid your mind of the young Count's misfortune. These tragedies are of frequent occurence at Court; you will have your heart bleeding every day of the year if you feel such disasters too deeply."

Madame du Hausset passed on, and Destine hastened upstairs.

A strange resolve shone upon her face. Her thoughts had shaped themselves into a decision. There was a tense expression about her mouth. Rebellion for once had blossomed up in her heart. She would do what she thought best, and that without delay, regardless of Madame du Hausset, or any other court dignitary.

The mildest natures sometimes develop under emergencies a decision of character that is astonishing to themselves. So it was with Destine. Her spirit had always been flexible to the great impersonal Will that surrounds us, and she was by nature acquiescent to the forces that shaped her life. She embodied the true spirit of passive-

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ness, which gradually gathers to itself an unconscious battery of power, awaiting some crucial moment to reveal its stored-up energy. And now, in accordance with her nature, she gave herself up to the force that suddenly took possession and impelled her to action. She was carried out of herself by the consciousness of the Count de Vrie's danger; she did not stop to reason about probabilities or obstacles. Without willing any particular method, she simply moved on. The autumn leaf was never swept along by a more resistless force than was Destine now swept along by the impelling power of her love and sympathy.

Once in her room, she proceeded with nervous fingers to prepare a careful toilet. She arrayed herself again in the treasured white communion gown, and over this she threw a long, hooded, blue cloak.

She was about to open the door to go out when, suddenly turning, she threw herself on her knees, and with mingled tears and prayers, besought the Blessed Virgin to save the Count de Vrie from the Bastille, — "the terrible Bastille!" — a phrase not new to the Mother of Sorrows.

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Chapter XXI

A CONFIDENCE IN A WOOD

IT was a sweet, brave face that looked from beneath the blue hood some moments later, when one of the gendarmes at the gate of Bellevue cried out:

"Who goes there?"

"Femme-de-chambre of the Marquise," was the prompt reply.

As the gateman let her pass she started forward, but turned suddenly back to ask a question.

"Will you kindly direct me how to go to Versailles?"

"Straight ahead, Mademoiselle. Take the roadway on through the woods."

Destine hurried along, but her thoughts were swifter than her steps. The gatekeeper's question had shown how strict a guard was being kept on Bellevue. This made her see in every detail the culmination of Louis' wrath toward the Count.

"A la Bastille! A la Bastille!" Destine felt her

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every heart-beat pounding out those words. Her ears seemed to ring with their horrible sound.

She kept moving on for a time, but at last, after half an hour of rapid walking, her strength of courage failed: she could go no farther. An audible cry escaped her as she flung herself upon a fallen tree by the roadside, giving way to the wildest paroxysm of weeping. The moss-grown trunk was watered by her tears, and the winter silence broken by her sobs. The fallen leaves, and the ice-encrusted earth seemed to bespeak the frozen hope within her heart. Gathering her cloak about her, she buried her face in its folds, as though to shrink from the weight of winter woe, within and without.

She had met no living creature during her walk, for the road to Bellevue was little used when the Chatelaine was away. Where Destine sat weeping, only rustling leaves and the swaying of bare boughs broke the stillness.

Suddenly a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a gentle voice addressed her:

"My child, what grief is upon you?"

She looked up through her heavy lashes and then in mute despair clasped the kindly hand

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extended to her; a large, white hand finely shaped and well-cared for, with a massive ring upon it.

In that one glance upward Destine had discovered a priest, clad in the coarse black garb of the Order of the Jesuits. She had not imbibed any of the animosity toward the Order which Madame Pompadour and her followers so zealously disseminated; she knew only of the Jesuits' good works, their distinguished teachers, their self-sacrificing piety and their gentle ministrations.

He was of somewhat portly figure — this unknown forest-friend — with a face whose natural expression of benevolence and sadness seemed accustomed to hide itself behind a masque of reserve. His eyes, kind, thoughtful, observing, rested tenderly upon the weeping girl, as he asked with earnest solicitude:

"Does life go so hard with you, child?"

She could not speak at first, but leaned her hot face upon his hand until her sobs grew less violent.

Between broken breaths, she repeated, fitfully:

"He is going to the Bastille! He is going to the Bastille!"

"Who is going to the Bastille?"

There was mild authority in the speaker's

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[illegible] finely she set
[illegible] ring upon it.
[illegible] bed, dis-
[illegible] garb of
[illegible] jesuits. [illegible] mingled any
[illegible] which [illegible]me
[illegible] zealously dis-
[illegible]ted, she knew [illegible] jesuits' good
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[illegible]ing piety [illegible]nal motions.

[illegible] wa[illegible] of [illegible]y figure — this
[illegible]known [illegible] with a face whose
natural [illegible] [illegible]ce and sadness
[illegible] [illegible] a manner
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] ritual of serving,
rested [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] as he talked
with [illegible] soli[illegible].

"[illegible] [illegible] [illegible], child?"

[illegible] [illegible], but heard her not.
[illegible] [illegible] grew less violent.
"[illegible]between brol[illegible] [illegible] spea[illegible], fitfully:
"[illegible] is going to [illegible] [illegible] life is going to the
Bas[illegible]!"

"Who is going [illegible] [illegible]?"

There was mild [illegible] in the speaker's

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"MY CHILD, WHAT GRIEF IS UPON YOU?"

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voice; a pleasant ring of power underlying the gentle inflections.

Destine looked up appealingly and found so much of sympathy in the noble face, that she was filled with absolute trust.

"O Father," she impulsively pleaded, "perhaps you can help him! Perhaps you can tell me how I may save him? I would walk all the way to Our Lord's Holy Sepulchre! pray forty years on my knees without ceasing! sing Aves day and night till I die, if anything — anything I might do could save him."

She bathed his hands with her tears, and clasped her own in entreaty.

"Yes, yes; I will tell you his name — tell you all," she added quickly, noting the query still on his face.

But then she hesitated a moment, looking about with troubled glance, as though fearing the trees might hear or that she did wrong to speak out her sorrow.

"All confessions are sacred to the Church," the priest assured her. "Tell me your story, and have no fear."

His words gave her courage. It eased the weight

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on her heart to confide in this grave-voiced, friendly friar, who seated himself at her side while she told of all the past suffering and present danger of De Vrie. At this name the priest showed astonishment.

"You surely do not mean the royal Introducteur des Ambassadeurs, Romain de Vrie, who suddenly died some weeks ago?"

When enlightened further he listened with exceeding interest. He seemed well-informed about court affairs and understood, better than Destine could tell him, the extent of Louis' great wrath and of Romain's probable punishment. He shook his head sadly.

"The King, I fear, will be unrelenting. Poor child! I wish I had the power to clear the skies for you. If I were King your tears should be dried at once, I assure you. I would sign De Vrie's pardon—and many another's—even though I had to use my sword for a pen and my blood for ink."

A tinge of bitterness was discernible in the priest's voice with these words.

Destine looked up at him curiously, longingly, and was comforted by the sudden gentleness that sounded in his next remark.

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"But I don't wish wholly to discourage you. See Madame de Pompadour, if you can, though I doubt whether her influence with the King in *this* matter will weigh more than would yours — perhaps not so much. But try — by all means try. I can give you no better advice."

He arose as he spoke. She prepared to go on her way, wrapped her cloak more closely about her and then thanked him earnestly for his kind words.

"Only give me yet your blessing, good Father, and I shall go on my road more bravely."

She knelt before him while above her bowed head he silently extended his hand. The next moment he said, "Farewell," and turned to leave her.

"By what name shall I think of you?" Destine suddenly thought to ask.

"My name is Father Bon Esprit," he quietly replied, and then they separated.

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Chapter XXII

A ROOM EMPTY OF GOD

ANOTHER hour of brisk walking brought Destine to Versailles. A sense of safety possessed her as she threaded the narrow, cobble-paved streets, with their low stone houses, humble shops, and earnest labourers in work-a-day clothes. There was something comforting in the homely honesty of these peasant faces.

She inquired her way of a bare-headed, broad-shouldered woman who, hitched with a dog, was pulling a small cart-load of kindling-wood, and filling the air with lusty cries of "Marchand de bois! — Marchand de bois!" The wood-seller paused, wiped her brow with a huge red handkerchief, and then, smiling kindly, gave the information in broad patois.

At another corner, in an open door-way, a vender of fried potatoes was tending a sizzling pan on a little charcoal burner. Here Destine asked again. The woman at once stepped out-

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side of the doorway and, pointing with her long iron ladle, explained very minutely the shortest route: adding by way of encouragement, "It is only a five-minute walk."

Destine went slower as she neared her journey's end. She dreaded facing the royal-guards: how much more approachable were these plain, tranquil villagers!

Arriving at the high-walled court-yard in front of the palace, she timidly questioned the sentry standing at the foremost gate. He indicated to her a side entrance where she should again inquire. Here the guardsman stared at her; incredulous, but admiring: he knew of no *femme-de-chambre* of her name, but allowed her to pass, and told her which entrance was the more direct to the apartment of Madame Pompadour.

After another forbidding gateman had been vanquished, Destine found herself within the great palace of Versailles.

Here she encountered the splendid *garde-de-corps* in their regalia of red velvet, blue linings and gold trimmings. Groups of gentlemen and numerous pages were lounging about.

Destine, half-resolute, half-shrinking, spoke to

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the nearest page; saying she had come from Bellevue and wished to see Madame Pompadour on a matter of importance.

One of the gentlemen nearby, hearing her request, came forward, bowing and smiling upon her in a way that made Destine feel most uncomfortable. But she forgot all embarrassment in the feeling of despair that swept over her when she heard the young man's words:

"Madame de Pompadour left the palace half an hour ago. I do not know when she returns. She may remain at Croisy over-night."

A sickening sense of the futility of her errand, for a moment, held Destine speechless. She saw nothing before her but hopelessly to return along the weary road to Bellevue. Suddenly she recalled certain words of the priest, and decided to make one more effort. She was in reality as frightened where she stood as any panting deer, but the thought of the Bastille gave her strength to speak up bravely and ask:

"Is the King in the palace? I wonder if I could see him?"

Strange looks were exchanged by the gentlemen who heard her. One or two laughed slightly.

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The one who had before addressed her, bowed again and said, in lowered tones.

"If you wish to see his Majesty, follow me, Mademoiselle, and I will take you to his apartment at once."

His narrow eyes scrutinised her so sharply, his whole look and manner were so unpleasant and even suggestive, that Destine's first impulse was to turn and fly back to Bellevue.

The possibility of seeing and appealing to the King, however, must not be lost: the priest had said that her word might accomplish as much in this matter as a plea from the Pompadour.

"Can I really see the King and speak with him?" she asked incredulously, and again wondered why the men smiled. One of them spoke up:

"There's no doubt of it, if you follow Lebel! He's the King's most devoted valet and will take you to his Majesty direct as a bird can fly!" There was general laughter at this, and another voice added:

"By all means follow Monsieur Lebel, Mademoiselle, if you wish to see the King!"

Monsieur Lebel, in the meantime, did not smile at all but motioned her to go with him. She was

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so glad to escape from the unpleasant company in the entrance hall that she followed without further question.

He led her past the great Escaliers des Ambassadeurs, whose sweeping grandeur of gold and marble awed even Destine, already accustomed to the display at Bellevue. All along the gallery through which she was led there were soldiers and officers of the crown, in dazzling uniforms, maintaining rigid positions. Venders of flowers, tinder-boxes and stationery, were met with along the route, each offering wares to the passer-by. One rude guest, who in spite of guards and locks had found free entrance, whistled at will around pillared corners and chiselled casements; the winter wind only laughed at grandeur and state.

It was not long before Lebel turned into a narrow passage-way, dimly lighted. He touched Destine's arm while leading her. His soft manner and insinuating voice made her heart shrink within her, she knew not why. He opened a door, cautioning her about a step as he did so, and then ushered her into a large apartment.

"This is his Majesty's private room, Mademoiselle. Make yourself at ease until he comes."

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The room was vacant. Destine's mind at first was chiefly absorbed in watching Lebel who, without a word, lighted an oil lamp of carved onyx suspended from a bronze bracket on the wall. He then drew across the windows heavy satin curtains of pale green and gold.

Destine thought it early for a lamp to be lighted, but supposed there was some rule requiring the palace to be illuminated at four o'clock.

Lebel begged her to be seated, as he moved forward a low divan.

"Are you sure his Majesty will not be offended if I await him here?" she ventured to ask.

"Have no fear, Mademoiselle; his Majesty has a kind heart for young girls like you."

He hovered near and ogled her smilingly, in a way that disturbed her.

"You will find him very gracious," he continued, "very! I will now apprise him of your presence. Au revoir, Mademoiselle. No one will disturb you here. Au revoir."

The royal valet bowed again and, to her relief, made his exit.

Left to herself, Destine was for a time absorbed in planning her method of appeal to the King.

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She trembled at the mere thought of the interview, but shuddered still more at thought of the fate awaiting Romain de Vrie should she fail to move the King. She tried to charge her mind with certain words and phrases, repeating the form of her petition many times.

At last, grown tired of waiting, she sought to while away the moments by observing her surroundings.

How wonderful it seemed to be in the King's palace; in his own private room! What a contrast between this sumptuous apartment, with its high-vaulted ceiling, gold frescoes and satin walls, and the white-washed simplicity of St. Cyr! She wondered what Sister Therese would say to such splendour. Somehow she wished that gentle-faced nun might be with her at this moment. She had never felt so alone in her life, and a strange sense of bereftness possessed her. She forced her mind to examine minutely each article in the room. She contemplated the various paintings on the wall and the mounted boar's head; a late trophy of the King's hunting. Her eyes sought to follow the slow-moving hands of the great porcelain clock. The King's bed, stand-

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ing in the alcove beyond, supported upon a dais by four golden lion paws, and the divan upon which she was seated, with its brocade covering of Watteau design, all received careful scrutiny.

Surely the King must soon come. But still no sound reached her. More and more fearful grew the nameless apprehension creeping on her soul. Something about the room was oppressive, due to a strange and subtle influence which she could not understand. She closed her eyes for a moment in an effort to conquer her unbridled imaginings; but in spite of all that she could do, evil forms and unwelcome voices seemed to hover around her in a sort of wild phantasmagoria. A heinous power seemed to possess and throttle her self-command: in vain she strove to conquer it.

She glanced at an open book which lay on a table beside her, but here her gaze encountered a startling and suggestive picture; well-suited to the taste of King Louis but entirely new and abhorrent to Destine.

She covered her face with her hands and tried to pray, but the words would not shape themselves. Never before had she been unable to pray! What could it mean? Suddenly the thought

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rushed over her that in this room God did not abide!

A terror, like that which a child feels in the dark, seized her. Grasping her cloak she flung it over her shoulders, and started forward intending to flee from the palace, but at this moment the great folding doors were thrown open, and she saw before her — the King!

Prompted by a blind instinct of fear, Destine retreated, until she found herself within the recess of a window where the curtains easily concealed her. She clutched them for support, trembling with fright, and then saw that the King was not alone. A number of persons were with him, assisting him as he stepped forward, his hand to his heart, and splashes of blood on his velvet coat.

"Gentlemen, I am wounded," he repeated several times.

Footsteps sounded in the corridor, voices ran along the hall, exclamations, questions, cries. Excitement sprang up without and within. Yells ascended from the court-yard, people were running, crowds were increasing. Shouts rent the air; "Death to the assassin!" "The King has been killed!" "The Dauphin is threatened!"

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"Treason!" "Murder!" "Guard the gates, in the name of France!"

Within the bed-chamber, the commotion was intense.

"Look to the Dauphin," were the King's words, as they placed him on the bed, swooning; his face a growing whiteness.

Women's voices were now heard. Courtiers suddenly made way with great deference; the Queen had come — poor, plain, pious Marie Lyscinska, whom the King neglected in health, but turned to in sickness.

Recovering consciousness as she approached he extended his hand. She pressed his fingers to her lips, kneeling beside the bed. A doctor leaned over him, cutting away lace and ribbons that covered the wound.

So crowded was the room that Destine, quite unperceived, succeeded in reaching a little door near-by. She was too agitated to use much caution, but the interest was so centred upon the wounded King, that no one heard the sound of the door as it closed behind her.

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Chapter XXIII

A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS AT THE DOOR OF DEATH

DESTINE found herself at the head of a small stairway, not knowing where it might lead her. Having no other choice she descended, stumbling several times in terrified haste, for it was so dark she had to feel her way.

At the foot of the stairs she found a door. On the point of opening it she heard voices on the other side, and her courage failed. She sat down on one of the steps, absolutely unequal to facing another group of strangers who might peer and leer and question.

A very lonely and miserable young person was Destine, as she sat there huddled in a heap like a frightened hare trying to make its way out of a dark wood.

She now wished she had heeded Madame du Hausset's advice. Versailles was no place to come to unsummoned! How foolish she had been to suppose she could persuade a King to change

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his mind! And yet, even now, she could not imagine herself seeing the Count de Vrie dragged off to the Bastille, without having made some effort, however futile, to save him. No, she could never have stayed tranquilly at Bellevue, doing nothing. But if only she had tried something else! if only she were not here! or if only Madame Pompadour had been home!

These thoughts crowded in upon her memory of the King with blood-stains on his coat. Perhaps he was dying! Someone had killed him! A murderer was in the palace! Suppose he was hiding now as she was; and suppose he was somewhere on this same dark stairway, near where she sat!

The horror of this last thought was suddenly relieved by a cheering sound that reached her from the other side of the door. It was Madame Pompadour's voice! There was no mistaking it. She seemed to have just returned, and was very excited. Others, too, were talking hysterically. The air was full of exclamations:

"Mon Dieu! The King! Killed!"

Destine waited no longer, but knocked confidently at the little door. It was promptly opened by the Marquise herself, whose overpowering

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amazement at sight of Destine in that place and at that time may be understood when it is explained that she was gaining admission to Madame Pompadour's room by way of a private staircase that had been specially constructed for the King's use alone.

A dead silence pervaded the boudoir while the Marquise was regaining her breath. Then she exclaimed, as Destine entered:

"In the name of Heaven, where do you come from? Tell me, quick! Can't you speak?"

The general astonishment and Madame Pompadour's severity almost paralysed Destine, but she was able to say in a faltering voice:

"I was in the King's room."

At any other time this confession would have aroused Madame Pompadour's deepest anger, but the attempted assassination had so reversed all dimensions as to elevate Destine into the position of a momentary heroine. Great was her astonishment at the change which came over Madame Pompadour, who now asked eagerly:

"Did you see the King when he was brought in?"

"Yes."

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"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! was he already dead?"

"Oh no, Madame, he was talking."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the Marquise, fairly beating her breast in excitement. "He was talking, she says he was talking! Then he cannot be dead yet. He may live after all. But tell me — why don't you tell me — what did he say? And who was with him? What were they saying? Did you hear my name mentioned? Sit here: what did they say?"

Destine thought it wonderful and very lovely of the Marquise to feel so intensely over the possibility of his Majesty's dying. She did not know that his death would mean the Pompadour's downfall.

She was puzzled, too, to understand why the Marquise did not go herself to the sick-room, or send someone to inquire, if she was so eager to hear the latest news. Her inexperienced mind could not know that the opposing powers in State affairs had come into ascendancy immediately after the King was stricken. Two men, d'Argenson and the Dauphin, alone were able to make any room too crowded for Madame Pompadour to get in. Under these circumstances, Destine had found

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herself received with open arms as the bearer of great news. She had to describe every detail of the scene as she saw it in the royal sick-room. And it was some time before the Marquise was sufficiently satisfied to manifest any curiosity as to how her young protégée came to be in the palace at all.

But this was the subject of chief concern to Destine, who found ready words with which to talk of the Count de Vrie and his terrible plight, and to explain how she had come to entreat the King to save him.

Madame Pompadour gave a moment of serious attention to Destine's earnest speech, asking several questions about the Count's present condition and the care he had received. Then she frankly explained that it was absolutely hopeless to think of dissuading the King from his purpose. His Majesty had been so exceedingly incensed against the Count that it would be unadvisable even to mention his name in the Royal Presence; in fact there was every likelihood that, if the King were called upon to give another thought to the affair, he would change the decree to death. She herself greatly regretted De Vrie's

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unfortunate fate, but realising that nothing could avert it, she had banished the unpleasant incident from her mind.

"Sad thoughts make one grow old. I never indulge in them," she announced philosophically, "and therefore I make myself forget the Count de Vrie. You had best do the same, little one. I will help you to do so by keeping you here at Versailles. I know that your dreams of this cavalier began some months ago."

She patted Destine's cheek and added: "You had better forget him at once."

"That is what he told me to do," the young girl acknowledged sadly, but her tones plainly indicated that she could not and would not forget. Suddenly she asked, with fresh intensity:

"Tell me, Madame, is there no slightest possibility, no unheard-of chance that he may yet escape? Can nothing happen to free him?"

"Nothing whatever," the Marquise answered, "unless, of course, the King should die. Grand Dieu! if that should happen —!"

Madame Pompadour was submerged again in grief at this terrible possibility, while Destine found herself wishing, with all the force of her

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disloyal young heart, that there would soon be a great funeral at Versailles.

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Chapter XXIV

THE HINGES OF CHANGE

THE excitement caused by the attack on the King was followed by a grave diplomatic situation, lying underneath an aspect of deep solicitude for the Sovereign.

The general feeling of anger had been somewhat quieted by the prompt arrest of the assassin, Damiens by name, whom the law was prepared to deal with in a manner sufficiently barbarous to satisfy the most blood-thirsty Royalist.

With public feeling put at rest on this point, all interest centred in the royal bedchamber.

It soon became evident that the King's wound, in itself, was not dangerous, for the weapon proved to have been only an ordinary pocket-knife. The suggestion was entertained however that poison may have gone with the blow. The King was certainly weak. The excitement around him had in fact been ample enough to cause weakness.

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Followers of the Dauphin were urgent in appeals for the King to be prepared for the worst by taking the last sacrament; a ceremony that was desired less from fear of his Majesty's death than from a wish for the dismissal of the Pompadour; an act the Church would require as proof of repentance.

Louis understood exactly what was meant, for he had had the same experience before, on the occasion of his illness at Metz. He could not forget the prayers then said, nor the tears shed, the solemn ceremony, the confessions and renunciations, and the final dismissal of poor Châteauroux, the former Favourite, who had felt the blow so keenly that a few months later, she died. Poor Châteauroux! and then — presto! — he did not go to Heaven after all!

The King, this time, was not to be persuaded so easily. He did not object to confessing his sins, or even repenting; but to perform the act of reparation was something to hesitate over, that is, if there were doubts of his dying! He did not feel that he was so near the grave as the priest's ominous bearing and the Queen's tears implied.

Dr. Quesnay, summoned from Bellevue, said

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there was no apparent danger; but Dr. Quesnay, it was remarked, as a friend of the Marquise, would be the last to admit that such a calamity was imminent. Indeed, her friends all scouted this idea, foreseeing her doom and their own if the King should be induced to accept the last sacrament. They accordingly exerted every permissible effort to postpone it. In one ear the King would hear words of cheer as to his condition and probable recovery, and in the other ear, the voice of his confessor:

"Let not the hour delay, Sire: your soul's peril should be heeded."

But Louis was not disposed to think of his soul. What a pity that the repentance at Metz would not hold good for this time also; it had been so complete! A pleasant sensation of righteousness stole over him as he recalled the sincerity of his feelings at that time. But he had been sick longer and was much weaker than now. Still one could never tell; perhaps death was nearer than he supposed. He found it hard to decide. He could not bring himself to speak the fatal words. Not today; perhaps he would do so tomorrow, he would surely live till tomorrow, and with this

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thought his Majesty turned upon his right side, and went to sleep.

During the evening and through the night, the combined indecision and anxiety of the courtiers, who wished to place themselves upon a right footing whatever might be the dicing of Death, were constantly manifested in their deportment. Had there been a general anticipation of the King's death, it is safe to assert that not one bow of recognition would have greeted Madame Pompadour as she passed from her apartment to the royal chapel where Mass was said and prayers offered for the King. As it was not certain that she would lose her power, few cared openly to risk offending her. Nor was it advisable to be seen paying court to her, if one sought to be included in the Dauphin's party.

The only course in this quandary was to avoid meeting her. Those who could not do so, unconsciously bowed a shade less low, and were strangely sparing of their words. Once she saw Monsieur Machault at the foot of the grand stairway, and was on the point of addressing him, when he passed on to the Salle des Ambassadeurs. He could not have seen her, she thought.

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The King was awake during much of the night. As the weary hours wore away, his thoughts, always prone to melancholy, grew more and more gloomy. The dismal chaunting of the priest beside him continually telling his beads; the hanging lamp with its low-turned light like a half-closed eye watching and waiting for him to die; the tip-toe steps of passing attendants; the occasional striking of the clock in the court-yard, which intoned slowly, like a funeral knell; all served to terrify the royal conscience.

Louis wearily turned his head; his arm chanced to hang over the edge of the bed, and instantly a caressing touch thrilled him. Mars, the great bloodhound who heeded no other master, crouching beneath the bed had quickly crept forward to lick the extended hand. Louis had always been proud of the affection of this dog which bestowed only menacing growls upon every other man at Court. He had often remarked:

"I know that Mars loves me for myself alone, and not because I am King of France."

Tears now dimmed the eyes of King Louis as he softly murmured: "My only friend! in all this world — my only friend!"

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The next morning, Louis summoned his Ministers to his bedside, and announced a decision he had resolved upon during the night.

"I feel myself weaker," he said, "and although my condition may not be alarming, yet in the present state of public affairs in Parliament and the Army, I feel that to have the throne-chair in the council-room remain vacant, even for a few days, might be disastrous. I shall therefore feel less uneasy if I endow the Dauphin, for the time, with full power."

Some objections and much surprise greeted this decision, but the King was obdurate.

"Such are my wishes, gentlemen. Pray send for the Dauphin."

The Dauphin was soon announced. Respectfully bowing at the bedside, Louis, the Dauphin of France, stood before Louis, the King. Father and son were as unlike in appearance as in temperament. The Dauphin was dressed in black satin, unadorned save for the *cordon* of St. Esprit which showed beneath his coat, and a few other orders modest in display. He might almost have passed for an ordinary country gentleman. His face, strong-featured and kind, was slightly

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pitted by small-pox. His figure was short and thick-set. In character the Dauphin was as pious as his father had been dissolute. He was devoted to the Jesuits, and fond of secret alms-giving and errands of charity. Dutiful at all times, in spite of his manifest disapproval of his father's mode of life, he maintained the King's genuine regard and affection.

"My son, I leave you a realm greatly troubled. I hope you will govern it better than I have."

The sick ruler proclaimed these words earnestly, and their pathos went piercingly to all hearts. Had this Dauphin lived to govern France, his father's hopes would in all probability have been realised.

Having taken the necessary oath in the presence of the King and Ministers, Louis, the Dauphin, became vested with governing power for as long a period as the King should be ill. The ceremony left the sick man weaker.

"There remains yet one office to be performed," the priest softly pleaded, "and then, Sire, you shall find rest."

A tense, breathless moment for all. The Jesuits and the Dauphin were convinced that the welfare

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of France depended upon Pompadour's dethronement. Now was the time, if ever. Would Louis give his consent? Every follower of the Favourite prayed fervently that he would not.

The King sighed deeply, was a long time silent, then with evident effort, he spoke a few words, but so low that none but the priest could hear.

"Amen!" was the deep response, then rising with the crucifix held before him, the Jesuit, white to the lips, his voice shaken by emotion, impressively announced:

"His Majesty requests the Prime Minister to dismiss from Versailles Madame la Marquise de Pompadour."

A palpitating silence held the room: the import of this dismissal, its far-reaching consequences, loomed up before that group of courtiers like an oncoming avalanche. Each one silently measured his neighbour with himself: "Will the shadow of her passing fall on you — or me?"

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Chapter XXV

A KING CAN COMMAND, AND A WOMAN DISOBEY

IT was Machault, hitherto her staunchest friend, who bore the news to the Marquise; a loathsome task, but gladly undertaken by this weather-vane diplomat, who hoped thereby to impress the Dauphin with his loyalty to the throne, and his indifference to Madame Pompadour's feelings.

In the reception room of her apartment, he met Madame du Hausset, who had been summoned from Bellevue with Dr. Quesnay.

"How fares the Marquise?" Marchault inquired.

"Much troubled, Monsieur, and very anxious. She has been looking for you every hour."

Madame Pompadour was reclining wearily in a massive arm-chair, but when she heard the name of the friend she most depended on, her spirits revived.

"Ah, he has not forsaken me; thank God!"

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Rising to greet Machault, she dismissed her attendants as he entered. The nterview lasted nearly half an hour. Monsieur Machault then passed hastily through the ante-room and the ladies-in-waiting were summoned to their Mistress whom they found in an alarming condition. Her face was of ghastly hue, and her teeth chattered so violently that when she was handed a goblet of orange water it was thought necessary to use one of silver, as glass might be broken.

The Abbé de Bernis had arrived, to be with her when crushed by the message from the King. She was now sobbing aloud, and moaning piteously.

"I must leave at once; I am turned out like a servant, shown to the door, sent away in disgrace. Ah, Châteauroux! Châteauroux! I now think of you; but your fall was not so terrible as mine!"

The frenzied Marquise paced the room one moment, threw herself in a chair the next: then she walked about or leaned with her arm on the chimney-piece, heedless of those about her.

Though her suffering was real and she had been cut to the quick of her heart, Madame Pompadour's second nature, her instinct for the dramatic,

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was paramount even then. Not a pose was ungraceful, not a discordant tone of voice marred the tragedy.

"Ah, Messieurs," she presently announced, in a tone of quiet despair more touching, perhaps, than the clamorous out-cry; "you are witnessing the fall of a star — in an instant all is over — the heavens are reversed for me."

She seemed now to be addressing herself: she was seated with her elbow on the table, her face in her hand.

"Three months it took Châteauroux to die. I shall not take so long; my fall is greater; mon Dieu! so much greater!"

Again she succumbed to the most violent weeping, and then followed an interval of hysterical gratitude to those about her for not leaving her entirely alone. At last it occurred to her that she must give orders for packing.

"Lose no time, Mesdames, — I almost forgot — the orders are for Jeanne Antoinette, the Marquise de Pompadour, to leave the precincts of Versailles *tout de suite!*"

Bitterly she enunciated these words and a species of strength came with the sarcasm.

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All that afternoon confusion reigned in the apartments of the ex-Favourite. Everyone was pressed into service; even Destine had her share of work.

Monsieur de Marigny was also present. Having heard of his sister's dismissal, he came at once to assist in sorting books and papers and, if possible, to give her consolation. The Marquise gave way to tears at sight of her brother who, she knew, must fall with her and lose his position as Superintendent of Public Works. For the first time in her life, she wept upon his shoulder and felt some sense of protection in his supporting arm. She spoke to him at last:

"François, my poor brother! — to think that you, too, must go! And all our beautiful public buildings, our plans, everything unfinished! How will they complete the Pont Neuf and Place Louis Quinze without you? Oh, they will miss you, François; some day they will know and value what they are losing."

Toward evening, Madame Pompadour found strength to assume some of her old manner. She planned to go out of Versailles with head held high, and radiant as in her palmiest days.

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"Vîtement, dépêchez-vous;" she called to her maids. "Dress me with care, for I wish to look my best. The robe with the little roses on the petticoat, and the low corsage without lace or trimming. Yes, and diamonds — all I can wear!"

She was in smiles and spoke with feverish animation, while the maids arranged her hair and dressed her feet.

"I will send Du Hausset tomorrow to finish with the packing. Yes, put that diadem on my head, and the star also. My last evening shall be brilliant: history shall chronicle how the Pompadour left Versailles! Have you sent for the carriage? Has it come? Ah, Monsieur de Bernis! I am glad you are here. We will go out together. Ninette, quick — my handkerchief. Now I am ready. Throw open the doors! Tell them la Pompadour is taking a drive in the air for her health! There, I am going! No, not that one; give me the cloak of ermine! You forget — it is cold in Versailles for me tonight!"

She started to go, smiling and chatting all the time to De Bernis, that the world might see how a star still shines even as it falls.

At this moment a flutter of silken petticoats

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was heard at the door, and surprised exclamations from a feminine voice, as there entered with gay gesticulations and much shrugging of shoulders, a vivacious and charming young woman; none other than Madame de Mirapoix.

"But what is the matter?" she inquired merrily. "I present myself at the outer door of your apartment — no one there! I enter the anteroom — no one receives me! No one stops my imperious progress until — me voici! And here I behold excitement and confusion! what has happened?"

"Ah, have you not heard?" replied Madame Pompadour, stepping back into the salon.

"No, I have heard nothing."

"Eh bien, the news is bad enough. I must leave Versailles this very night."

Madame de Mirapoix gave a low exclamation; thoughtfully nodding her head, and pursing up her pretty lips. As a result of this momentary cogitation, she spoke up with deliberation.

"So the King has ordered you to go!—*Don't do it!*"

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Madame Pompadour, "What are you saying? — It is a command."

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La Mirapoix shook her head with a deprecating toss and only repeated.

"*Do not mind it!*"

Surprised and excited by this daring suggestion, Madame Pompadour sank down in the nearest chair.

"But how dare I disobey? Think of the consequences."

Then the intrepid little woman explained her idea more fully, accompanying her speech with many gesticulations and pretty accents.

"Oh, you can make a pretence of going; send some boxes and one or two of your women in your coach. Give lots of orders, and make a fuss over it but — *don't go!* Take my word for it, the King does not want you away. They have forced him to this; scared him into thinking he is going to die. Oh, I know how they talk — d'Argenson and a whole crowd of Jesuits around his bed! They think if you are once out of the way, even if he should get well, the King is laisser-faire enough to be easily persuaded not to call you back; and there is something in that! But, au contraire, if he gets well and finds you still here — take my word for it — he won't be sorry!"

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Madame Pompadour looked toward her brother questioningly, and then suggested:

"But suppose the King dies?"

"Ah-h!" This was spoken as a prolonged exclamation of disbelief, accompanied by a quick shrugging of the shoulders that was an eloquent equivalent for the winking of one eye. "Don't you worry about that. They could not have kept him in bed this long if they had not gotten up that poison scare. Even that cannot hold out longer than tomorrow. Do you know, nothing can make me believe there was ever any intention of killing the King. With a penknife! — think of it! How absurd! when he had on his cloak and winter clothes! That blow was aimed at you, ma chère!" She lowered her voice and added impressively:

"Les Jésuites!"

"Do you really think that?" questioned the Marquise, amazed.

"That is exactly what I think and believe. They have tried to repeat that little incident of the King's illness at Metz; tried to disable him so that he could be scared into dismissing you, as he did Châteauroux. Take my advice, and stay where you are."

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Madame Pompadour clapped her hand on the table.

"Mirapoix, you are right! I will do it!" In her excitement she rushed over and hugged the little diplomat, declaring her to be the most adorable friend in the world.

"Oh, le bonheur! — we will do it! — we will do it! Anything in the world is better than going away tonight. And we shall see yet who triumphs — *les Jésuites* or *la Pompadour!*"

She said this with set teeth and the phrase was never forgotten by those who heard it.

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Chapter XXVI

IF YOU WERE KING

DURING the conversation with Madame de Mirapoix, the heart of one person in the room distinctly sank as that of Madame Pompadour arose.

Destine seldom grasped the meaning of conversations she overheard in Versailles, but she found this one distressingly clear. The King was getting well! This meant no hope for the prisoner in Bellevue. No hope! no chance of pardon! Madame Pompadour had said that "nothing whatever" could save him, unless the King should die.

Until this moment, Destine hardly realised how confidently she had hoped for his death. She had unconsciously been sustained by the fact that the Dauphin was invested with the King's power. He was ruling in the King's place, and it seemed to her that it was only a matter of hours until he would be King in name as well.

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So confident had she become, that her fears for the past two days had been quite laid at rest. She found herself observing things, and actually enjoying her experience in the royal palace. No one had paid much attention to her in the *bouleversé* condition of the Marquise' surroundings. She in truth had not been able to feel any great degree of sympathy or interest in Madame Pompadour's dismissal. This was because she could not understand anything about it. But when the Marquise threw off her cloak and gave little hysterical laughs of delight at the idea of staying in Versailles, Destine understood perfectly that the King would get well. Madame de Mirapoix was still talking.

"I heard my husband say this morning that the Dauphin's power would surely be rescinded tomorrow."

No one noticed the young protégée's downcast countenance as she mutely hearkened to Madame Pompadour giving directions in accordance with her latest plan. Several carriages were ordered, and a general impression conveyed of an immediate removal to Bellevue. Some of the ladies-in-waiting were actually to go. Destine was included

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among them. It was not many minutes before she had her long cloak about her, and in company with the others, was descending the grand stairway. She was indifferent to her surroundings, although this was probably the last glimpse she would have of Versailles. She hardly saw the many courtiers and attendants, soldiers and guardsmen, who silently made way as the ladies walked past.

On reaching the main entrance hall, their progress was brought to a halt and they were obliged to join a miscellaneous group at one side and wait while the Swiss Grenadiers lined up in readiness to salute the Dauphin whose coach was at that moment driving into the court-yard.

It was not long before the high double doors were thrown open to admit Louis, the Dauphin, who was escorted into the palace with all the ceremony accorded to the King.

"There he comes," said one of the ladies at Destine's side. A few hours ago she would have looked up with curiosity to see this important personage, but since he had disappointed her by not becoming an orphan, she felt very little interest in him—Prince Royal though he was.

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Mechanically she raised her eyes and saw advancing between the two rows of Grenadiers a gentleman of gracious bearing, whose strong personality no transformation of scene or costume could obliterate. With a sensation of dizziness that was hard to master, Destine recognised that face and figure. In her amazement and desire to see better, she leaned far forward, and before she knew it a name had fallen from her astonished lips.

"Father Bon Esprit!"

The priest and prince were indeed one and the same person. There was no mistaking those kind eyes or the slight markings on cheek and chin.

Meanwhile it chanced that the Dauphin saw the startled face leaning forward and heard the name she uttered which, like a mystic symbol, caught his attention at once. Pausing in momentary surprise, he recognised the earnest young face, hooded by the same blue cloak he had seen in the forest.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, it is you! I am glad you have not forgotten Father Bon Esprit."

Breathless surprise possessed every beholder of this incident, and envy filled many a heart as the Dauphin smiled kindly on the young girl who

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in spite of her surprise and confusion, was endowed with a sudden hope which prompted her timidly to reply:

"I could not forget him, for he promised — if he were King —," here her courage failed; the sound of her own voice frightened her and she lowered her eyes, terrified at what she had done.

But those few words were not lost on the Dauphin. He recalled that forest interview, and at the same time could not but admire the girl's attempt to remind him. The King's power was now his and to the conscientious mind of this Prince his duty was plain.

"A Jesuit priest never fails in his word, much less the Dauphin of France. I recall your mission, Mademoiselle, and your plea shall be granted."

He turned to his officers and added:

"Escort this young lady to my council-room that I may investigate her cause and make out the necessary papers."

He then proceeded up the stairway while Destine was directed to follow, all eyes being upon her.

"A protégée of the departing Marquise," they whispered to each other as she passed. Bewildered

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by the sudden occurrence, she walked as a spirit in a dream.

"A brave heart and a pretty face," was the inward comment of more than one observer.

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Chapter XXVII

THE TERROR BY NIGHT

AFTER the effective departure of her ladies for Bellevue, Madame Pompadour sat alone and undisturbed before her fire in the boudoir.

She had dismissed her remaining attendants, and ordered the doors of her apartment closed. For half an hour she had not moved. Troubled, anxious, weary thoughts caused her face in repose to reveal the marks of her thirty-five years of feverish life. A fretted brow and faint sagging lines at either side of her mouth told that all was not well with the Favourite. The wine of life had suddenly staled: the sparkle and zest had gone.

She had grave doubts whether the King would forgive her for remaining at Versailles in defiance of his order. On the other hand she knew only too well that, once out of the way, there was little probability that she would ever be recalled; Louis

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always followed the line of least resistance. To add to her disquietude, she was tortured with an underlying misgiving as to whether he had ever absolutely believed the story she had told about De Vrie. He had been kind to her of late; —but still — ? Pompadour sighed and closed her eyes as she forced herself to face the possibility that this might be her last night in Versailles.

At this moment she heard footsteps in the outer room. Who would dare to come in after she had given orders to admit no one?

Madame Pompadour's surprise amounted to anger when the door was impetuously burst open and there entered — confident and happy — the ubiquitous young person from St. Cyr!

"What does this mean?" asked the Marquise sternly. "Why are you not at Bellevue? Have the others not gone?"

The tone of voice in which these questions were asked would, at any other time, have completely crushed Destine, but when one had just come from an audience with the reigning Dauphin of France, a little temper on the part of a plain Marquise could pass unnoticed. Destine was too elated to feel the mental atmosphere.

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"Madame — is it not wonderful! Oh I can hardly believe it! *He is pardoned!* The Count de Vrie is pardoned! and is to be free at once. I saw the papers myself, and the courier is already gone with them."

"What are you talking about, child! Are you out of your mind?"

This suspicion of the Marquise was instantly dissipated by Destine's amused smile.

"No, Madame, but I don't wonder you think so. It is all so strange. But it is really, really true."

She dropped down on her knees beside the Marquise with a childish fearlessness that quite disarmed that lady's customary reserve. The glow of the embers lent an added radiance to Destine's face, as she impulsively related more of the recent happenings.

"All the other ladies went to Bellevue, as you directed. But I was ordered to go with the Dauphin."

"The Dauphin!" — Madame Pompadour was never more puzzled in her life.

"Yes, he was returning from a drive as we descended the stairs, and he passed close by us in the grand corridor. I suppose I leaned farther

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forward than the others — I was so surprised to see him — anyway, he recognised me."

Madame Pompadour sat bolt upright, completely unconscious of her attitude, and turning Destine's face full toward her own, she asked impressively:

"Do you mean to tell me that his Royal Highness, Louis, the Dauphin of France, was acquainted with you, so that he knew you at sight? No — it is impossible! The Dauphin! — the idea!"

The Marquise almost convinced herself again that Destine was bereft of reason; but the girl's story was soon made rational.

"Yes, I had met him before, and did not know it was the Dauphin: he was dressed as a priest, and stopped to talk to me when I was on my way here from Bellevue."

A light began to dawn upon Madame Pompadour, and she listened without comment to the rest of the story.

She was silent for some time after Destine had finished with a rapturously eulogistic account of the kind-hearted Dauphin.

Then the Marquise leaned back in her chair, her half-closed eyes resting with a new and puzzled interest upon the girl before her.

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She was wondering what strange faculty the child possessed that should sweep her every time into the very vortex of events. Demure, reti ing in manner, quiet, unsophisticated, and fresh from a convent, she nevertheless loomed up conspicuous in all emergencies. The first word the Marquise remembered hearing her speak was a name which that day had brought agitation to the entire royal hunting-party. Later, when Romain was lying at the point of death in the hidden room of Bellevue, she it was whom Fate and the King selected to rescue him. To Versailles she had come without call or cause, apparently for no other reason than to be on hand in the King's private room when he was assassinated! Then she uses the King's private stairway to make a sensational entrance into the boudoir of the reigning Favourite. And now it comes out that she is an old friend of the Dauphin! — who gladly does her a favour, thereby accomplishing what the Pompadour, with all her power, never could have achieved.

She looked again at Destine, and found herself absently wondering who might have been the girl's god-mother. At the same time she decided

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that a girl with such a propensity for being in the right place at the right time was an anomaly worth holding on to. — A mascot! Why, of course! She was that, and nothing else! Every occurrence had proved this. Only a mascot could so have fitted into the events of Versailles. Madame Pompadour's face lighted up with sudden joy. The Fates had sent her a mascot! She believed implicitly that Destine would yet bring her luck.

"I am glad you are with me tonight;" she spoke these words heartily, caressing at the same time Destine's upturned face with her hands. "I want you to stay always with me."

Madame Pompadour had become accustomed to surprising *dénouements* from Destine, but the next outburst that she heard was more astonishing than all the others.

"Dear Madame la Marquise, I beg you will not think me ungrateful, but — with your permission — I should like best to return to St. Cyr."

Madame Pompadour laughed outright.

"What will I hear next! Quelle drôle idée! Return to St. Cyr! Never! You dear little innocent! do you suppose I would permit you to ruin your whole life by returning to that stupid place!

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Non, non, non, non; you must stay now with me," and the Marquise, all amiability, patted her hand again and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Think of your music, child, and the opportunities I can give you. But above all, ma petite, let me tell you, I like you for your own sake — you entertain me — and I intend to keep you always near me. Oh, you shall not get away!" she added playfully, but impelled, none the less, by a strong determination to cling close to her mascot. "Indeed, I shall be afraid to let you out of my sight, since you have taken this insane notion of returning to your old holy-water, hallelujah home!"

Destine was distinctly shocked at this manner of referring to St. Cyr, but the Marquise, unheeding the effect of her words, continued blithely:

"I shall not allow you to run away, as you did from Bellevue, — you little Mademoiselle Flee-as-a-bird! — not even if I have to keep you in a gold cage, and feed you with sugar plums! You see I intend to keep an eye on you! and an ear on you, too, for I must have more singing than the past weeks have brought forth."

Destine was disconcerted by this gracefully-

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garlanded but none the less sharp-edged stay-where-you-are dictum. She had nothing to say and no answer was expected, for the Marquise dismissed her, with the parting injunction to sleep well and to dream of pleasure and feasting instead of prayer and fasting, which must be the lot of an inmate of St. Cyr.

But Destine was wakeful most of that night. So much had happened during the past hours that a tumult of thoughts possessed her. Again and again she tried to dismiss them. She drew up the bed-clothes closely about her, settled herself comfortably and shut her eyes firmly, but all to no avail. The fine-embroidered linen sheets imparted more cold than comfort, and the slippery silk covering on top was an aggravation when one tossed about. Destine thought longingly of the heavy grey blanket on her little bed at St.Cyr. Madame Pompadour need not have spoken so disparagingly of the convent; there was nothing very enjoyable about palaces! Indeed, Destine's impression of the life within them was altogether terrifying; a strange conglomeration of danger-lurking episodes, hidden stairways, concealed rooms, attempted murder, sudden disgrace, violent

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weeping — with the abyss of the Bastille yawning under all! Destine shivered, with an unshaped thought that possibly she herself might yet be sent to the Bastille. She marvelled at her own temerity in having dared to come to Versailles. It seemed a wonder that she had not been at once arrested or assassinated. Perhaps she had escaped only because the Dauphin happened to be in power.

With thoughts of the Dauphin came thoughts of De Vrie, and Destine found peace in her soul and joy in her heart. He was free! he was free! She repeated the words like a triumphant refrain.

The cold, unyielding pillow that supported her rounded cheek, was suddenly warmed by the contact. Then her heart sank a little as she realised that he soon would be far away. Would he think of her sometimes — perhaps? But how could she hope for this, when he had plainly told her to forget him? The pillow was now not only warm but just a little moist where a pair of long lashes brushed upon it. His words had been hard, but his manner, she recalled, had been tender. Destine was cheered at this memory; the

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look of his eyes, the touch of his hand, the tone of his voice — to think upon them was to dream of delight.

Then she remembered the earnest manner in which he had urged her to return to St. Cyr. There must be some very good reason why he had done this. Perhaps he knew that she was in danger of being sent to the Bastille! Mother of God! protect us! Destine silently crossed herself. Then she drew the covers up to her ears. But at this moment the silken quilt was caught in the act of slyly escaping to the floor. It took some courage to reach down and get it; the room was so dark and big! Very hastily and energetically the unruly quilt was spread into place, then Destine again tried to sleep. She lay quite still, but with wide-open eyes. The wind through the cave-like fireplace was howling dismally and a loosened shutter, somewhere, in fitful bangs upon the wall was protesting against its plight; a complaining hinge joined in every time with the protest. At times the wind, like a ghost out of breath, would abruptly cease its wailing, then the shutter too would stand still, as though listening and waiting for some uncanny occurrence. Destine did not move;

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she hardly breathed. Once the silence was broken by a snapping of the polished floor, as though someone were stealthily creeping across the room. Destine tried to peer through the darkness with her frightened, wide-staring eyes.

Presently she heard foot-steps out in the corridor. Suppose they were coming to arrest her! She listened with bated breath. The foot-steps passed her door, but the "terror by night" was upon her, and she thought again of the Bastille: ugh! rats and reptiles and oozy walls — then — cut your head off!

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Chapter XXVIII

UNDER MORNING SKIES

DURING the past few days, the quiet of Bellevue had been oppressive.

The servants, under no directing eye, lolled around in the anterooms, played shuttle-cock in the corridors, gossiped in every corner and gambled at any table.

But to Romain, conscious that his life was soon to be snuffed out under the turret of that famous extinguisher, the Bastille, the hours pierced the yawning mouth of the future like barbed javelins.

In spite of despair, the strength of youth and health was coming upon him. The old love of living was there, pressing for recognition, with all the importunities of a forgotten friend. But the life he dreamed of was something different than he ever had known before. His heart no longer beat in rhythm to the tempo marked by Louis' sceptre. The spirit within him was no longer that of a courtier. He had left that band of players and was now keyed up to a much higher harmony.

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Suffering, the great attuner, had so expanded his sympathies that he had come into unison with the mighty heart-throb of humanity.

He longed to live — to give — to retrieve the wasted years. His only prayer was to have a chance to help one suffering mortal; to feed one hungry man.

Feed the hungry! During the delirium of his illness this phrase had become to him a sort of enchanted watchword, and it still was the banner of his dreams: "Feed the hungry!" It was the only command in the Bible he could distinctly recall. It seemed to him the solution of the entire scheme of life; half the world had the power to give what the other half was needing. "Feed the hungry!"

The mere word "hunger" affected him strangely; it blazed up in his imagination like a tongue of flame. But this had not always been so. How often he had listened with a sense of irritation to petitions brought before the King, telling of famine in this or that province, of starvation among the poor.

"God! what was I in those days!" He cried the words aloud.

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One special incident now arose, to dance upon his memory like a demon on a grave. He saw the scene minutely; the royal hunting-party, a blaze of colour and a blare of sound, pausing at sight of a peasant trudging along the road with an empty coffin balanced upon his shoulder.

"Is it your own coffin you carry there?" asked Louis in jocose mood.

"No, it's for a dead man."

"Oh-ho! and how came he to die?"

"Hunger!" was the short reply, upon which the merry crowd of courtiers joined in a hearty laugh at what seemed to them a capital joke.

At this point in his silent reminiscence, Romain burst forth aloud:

"And I — I — who was there and heard — I laughed with the rest! Oh God! Forgive me! I laughed when I heard that a man died of hunger!"

Romain clenched his hands in a misery of remorse. He had learned what it meant to be hungry and hopeless; an initiation process that served to bring him into the great and sacred Brotherhood of Man.

Romain's heavy gloom of introspection was suddenly interrupted.

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It was a late hour for any disturbing sound. He wondered what it could be. There was a clanking of spurred heels in the hall, hurried steps, a loud knocking, and a commanding voice at his door.

Romain braced himself for the inevitable; he knew they had come for him at this unseemly hour to take him to the Bastille.

"Entrez, Messieurs!" he cried, with a voice of forced calm.

The doors were thrown open and the servant announced:

"A messenger from his Royal Highness, the Dauphin!"

In another moment a portentous document and a letter were handed to Romain. He opened the smaller missive first; his nervous haste causing him to tear the paper in several places.

The writing was in the Dauphin's own hand:

"Count de Vrie:

"Having heard of your unfortunate position, it affords me pleasure that I am able to sign for you an order of pardon. A passport to Spain also accompanies this letter, and I place at your disposal a coach which will call for you tomorrow

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at sunrise, to start at once to the southern frontier.

"His Majesty, the King, is expected to resume authority by the morrow, and you must be well on your journey before he learns of your release, as he undoubtedly will make every effort to have you re-arrested.

"Knowing which, my dear Count de Vrie, I pray God to have you always in His holy keeping.

"Louis. (Dauphin).

"Rex interim.

"Make no answer to this note. Prepare to set out at dawn."

As the purport of these words became clear to Romain's tense and tortured brain, he swayed backward, leaned against the wall for support; his face white as the paper in his hand. It took some time for him calmly to realise that he was no longer a prisoner.

When the messenger had gone and his mind at last could weigh what had happened, his thoughts all flew in one direction. As the magnetic needle when unloosed from restraint spins around sure and true to the north, so his hope, now unhampered, pointed straight toward Destine.

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He might have paused to wonder how and why the Dauphin happened so suddenly to think of pardoning him, and how he had the power to do so. But these were conjectures for another time. There was for him now but one star in the sky — Destine! His pulses throbbed with the thought of her. He had not seen her since that wretched hour when he had told her to try to forget him. He supposed she had purposely stayed away.

But now he could take back what he had said; he was free! He must see her at once. Destine! where was she! he rang for the *maître d'hôtel* and requested him to bring Mademoiselle de Vârel to the *petit* salon. Even if she were asleep she must be wakened and told to come. It was very urgent.

Then he waited. After a long delay, the servant returned: Mademoiselle de Vârel had not been seen for several days! She was not in her room.

It needed no more, to make Romain strong enough, and wild enough, and frantic, excited and distracted enough, to turn the entire Bellevue establishment into such a state of agitation as even Pompadour herself had never done.

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Lights were soon to be seen moving here and there through every room of the château. High and low they searched for her. The servants were questioned again and again. No one had been interested enough to miss her. She had not gone with Madame du Hausset; every one was certain on this point, as they all remembered that lady's excited departure with Dr. Quesnay. But what could have become of Mademoiselle? Everyone was aroused to excitement, everyone was sent to look in all possible places.

A terror greater than that of the Bastille swept over Romain, until at last they questioned the soldiers at the outer gate. "Yes, one of them remembered seeing her start out alone. She had asked the road to Versailles."

A great sigh of relief escaped from Romain. The mystery was solved. She had gone to St. Cyr, of course! It was where he had told her to go. She probably had walked the whole way alone, through Versailles, Bouviers, and all. Poor little grieved heart! If only she had met with no mishap!

He counted the minutes, until the first grey of dawn brought the coach that would take him to

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her. St. Cyr was out of his way, but he gave no heed to this. He must first see her; whatever else happened.

He watched the glory of the growing day. There was a marvellous cloth of hoar-frost laid upon the landscape and — wherever one looked, whatever one saw — the tiniest twig and the tallest tree were all alike half concealed by a glistening veil of white.

Romain from the carriage-window looked out upon the world with a holy sense of joy and gratitude. He seemed never to have seen it before. The world was so new and so beautiful! He found a subtle meaning in every object his eye encountered. He noted, as a profound and significant truth, that all things grow upward, point heavenward. He perceived, too, a spirit of kindness in all of nature's efforts; he felt the tenderness of the caressing vine about the fallen tree.

There was joy all around him, too, for the hoar-frost shimmered and danced and shone; it played with the rainbow, and toyed with the sunbeam, bathed all the world in colours, and drenched the trees in glory; every path was paved with pearls, while strands of trembling beads hung

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pendant along the fences: the earth had been dipped in a dream.

The coach rolled rapidly on, but not fast enough for Romain; his thoughts were already at St. Cyr.

They rattled through Versailles at a gallop; the great palace, like a phantom of the past, flashed into vision and then disappeared.

They turned into the woods of Bouviers. Mon Dieu! how slow the fellow was driving! Romain opened the door of the coach to expostulate with the man on the box. But at once he saw the reason of the retardation; a lumbering ox-cart was in the way. There! At last the clumsy beasts were making a move to the right. The ox-driver, in his long blouse and peasant's cap, shouted patiently to the animals.

A woman was seated in the back of the cart; her shoulders hunched up rather awkwardly in her endeavour to maintain equilibrium upon the jolting seat. Romain had time to observe her, for the road being narrow, his coach came cautiously alongside the cart. She seemed lost in thought; a hooded cloak concealed her form and features, but Romain dimly noted a venturesome curl of soft brown hair that had escaped from its confines to play in the breeze.

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Suddenly with a full, free breath the woman straightened her shoulders, and the hood fell back from her head. The effect was that of a flower unfolding, for the face revealed was fair and radiant, aglow with the freshness of the dawning day.

Romain looked at first in dizzy amazement. He doubted his own senses. He looked again. Then wonder grew to a certainty: it was she — Destine! In his astonishment he called her by name.

She looked around quickly, at first somewhat frightened, but the thrill of his voice soon reached to her heart. On seeing him she stood up in the cart, like Aurora in her chariot; the light in her face lending splendour to all her surroundings. She could not speak, the joy was too overpowering — the joy of finding him near, and of hearing her name on his lips!

"Destine!" he repeated, "have you dropped from the skies? Where have you come from, and why are you here?"

She smiled now, divinely — so it seemed to Romain — and found voice to answer, amid nervous little laughs which were meant to conceal the high beating of her heart:

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"I — am running away from Versailles!"

"So am I!" he exclaimed joyously.

At a signal from Romain his driver reined in the horses, and the plodding progress of the creaking cart was also brought to a halt.

"Come into my carriage," he kindly but firmly commanded: "Were you going to St. Cyr?"

Destine answered timidly, "Yes; you had told me to go there."

How he loved her for this speech and the trust it implied!

"I was going there too," he impulsively explained, "going to find you."

He saw the glad colour mount to her face.

"Come," he added with delightful authority as he stepped from the carriage and extended his hands. In helping her from the cart he found a chance to clasp her — ever so slightly — within his arms.

Destine felt as though a celestial chariot had suddenly appeared at her side to bear her, Elijah-like, away from earth to heaven. But in spite of her rapturous emotions, she did not forget to thank the kindly ox-driver who had aided her on her way.

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With hand on chin and hanging jaw, the peasant stood in the roadway stolid with astonishment, his eyes on the receding vehicle, as there gradually drifted to his brain a sense of romance in the air.

To Romain and Destine all the world seemed a-swing with gladness: the coachman was snapping his whip, the horses were speeding in rhythmic step, the sun had risen clear and strong, and the day marked the crest of life!

"I have found you! I have found you!" Romain exclaimed again and again. He drew her to him: "Destine! look at me!"

Slowly their eyes met — and then their lips.

A rush of melody filled her soul. That kiss was to Destine like the splendid, high note of a song. All the music of the world seemed suddenly resolved into one perfect cadence. She could have laughed or have wept — a tear or a tune — either one would have suited her heart's throbbing ecstasy. This wonderful consciousness of being loved! How could the stars stay in their places! how could the sun soar on, serene, when such a miracle had occurred! He loved her! Romain! Her rescuing Knight!

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"See!" she cried softly, "the woods of Bouviers! It was here we first met. Do you remember?"

Romain answered tenderly:

"I remember every word that you spoke, every glance of your eyes, and I remember, too, the song that you sang — 'Benedicite' — it has sounded through my dreams like a prayer."

He kissed her on brow and hair and eyes, and called her all dear names. She was his "Bird of the Forest!" his "Songster!" who must fly with him now to the south!

This phrase recalled Destine to the actual, and she started up in alarm.

"Mon Dieu! you must hasten to Spain! You are losing time. You are going the wrong way. I am keeping you. Sainte Marie! I had forgotten! Tell the coachman to stop, so I can get out, and you can turn back!"

"Not so fast, little one! I am going with you to St. Cyr." Romain's quiet tones bore that quality of command so dear to a woman's heart.

"But the King will send his gendarmes to follow and capture you," she persisted. "I know all about it, for I come from Versailles."

"Never mind about the gendarmes," he quietly

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admonished; "they at least will not look for me in a convent! And besides, I do not think there is such great need of haste: it will be some time yet before Louis learns of my flight. But it does not matter, for — come what may — I intend to find time, take time, make time, to accompany you, not only to the door of St. Cyr, but all the way —," he spoke the next words slowly, ardently, "all the way to the *altar in the chapel.*"

"See," he added brightly, "the sun is weaving for you a misty bridal-veil from the silvery spangled frost!"

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Chapter XXIX

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF A PALACE

WHEN the coach came to a halt in the familiar court-yard and Romain helped Destine to alight, she glanced up toward the dining-hall, and waved her hand gaily. There they all were, Adrienne, Fanchon, Ninette, and the rest; the half-frosted windows were crowded with faces, like the back-ground to the Sistine Madonna.

With their starched, white aprons, the girls rubbed the panes in an effort to see better the amazing sight of Destine de Vârel returning to St. Cyr with a handsome cavalier by way of chaperon!

Was he the same one, do you suppose, that she and Sister Therese had met in the forest? And, mon Dieu! how graceful he was! When he just now kissed the Mother Superior's hand, he bowed like Monsieur l'Abbé when he says "Our Lord Jesus Christ," in the Service!

"He is coming in with her, — there, do you see! — the coachman is blanketing the horses.

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Come quick, let us look over the banisters into the reception hall."

Like scurrying mice, and almost as softly, they tip-toed with all haste down the corridor, and were soon hanging over the railing, like a fringe of grey and brown tassels, fluttering and swaying in a breeze of curiosity.

"See! the Abbé himself has come forward to meet him. Fanchon — look quick! did you see him bow again? Mon Dieu! I could love a man if he never did anything else in the world but bow like that! Hush, Ninette, be quiet or they will hear you!"

"Oh,–là–là–là–! did you see his hands? They are white as the Mother Superior's cap! and his rings! Sanctissimo! That green stone's as big as a bean."

"What do you suppose they are talking about — the Abbé and the strange cavalier? There they go into the vestry, and here comes Destine running upstairs — she has seen us."

A moment more and she was with them, laughing, bright-eyed, pink-cheeked, out-of-breath, surrounded, embraced and questioned from all sides.

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In her accustomed surroundings and freed from restraint, Destine was at no loss for words. She could talk fast as any, and could laugh full and free, when untrammelled by the terrors of court etiquette. She found it such a pleasure to be herself once again, that her spirits bubbled over with animation.

She merrily motioned them back with their questions, and laughingly sat down on the top step to breathe. The others quickly grouped themselves around her upon the broad stairs, and Destine, leaning comfortably against the wall, declared it was the first time she had sat down to rest since she left them!

"You can't really rest on a chair that's embroidered as fine as our altar-cloths," she added by way of explanation. "And they are all like that in the palace at Versailles."

This last casually spoken word caused the girls to sway with astonishment.

"The royal palace! you don't mean to say you were there?"

Destine nodded lightly, enjoying the effect.

"Yes; just left it this morning."

When the girls regained breath their questioning was resumed in full force.

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"Do tell us about it! Is it all gold and marble, and crystal mirrors and polished floors?"

"Yes," she replied, as one unimpressed with the grandeur. "But do you know it was wonderfully cold! Most of the windows rattled."

"Cold!" they exclaimed, "think of a palace being cold!"

"I suppose that is why Kings and Queens always wear ermine!" put in Fanchon gaily.

"Did you see the King?" they inquired eagerly.

"Yes."

"And the Queen?"

"Yes."

"Was she beautiful?"

Destine smiled amusedly:

"I don't know; when I saw her she was in tears."

"Crying! I never supposed Queens cried!" Fanchon was quite thoughtful for a moment, but the others pressed their queries.

"Did you see any more of the royal family; a Princess, perhaps, or a Prince?"

"I saw the Dauphin."

"The Dauphin! mon Dieu, think of that! she

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saw the Dauphin, too! Was he the least bit like a fairy prince?"

"A fairy prince!" Destine answered this with enthusiasm. "Yes, he was exactly like a fairy prince. I could almost believe the fairies had sent him!"

"Tell us more about him," they persisted. "He must be magnificent. Is he tall and stately?"

"No, not tall; he is about the size of our Abbé."

"Ciel! you don't mean to say he is fat?"

Destine frankly confessed that he was, a little!

"A fat Prince!" Fanchon groaned.

Destine, growing warm, now threw back her cloak.

"Mother Marie! look at her dress! Where did you get it?" they exclaimed, in one breath.

"It is one Madame de Pompadour gave me; an old one, that belonged to her daughter."

"Old! does she call this old! It is beautiful enough for a bride!"

Destine suddenly threw her arms about the girls nearest to her, and announced, in tones confidential and vibrant with deep feeling:

"That is what I am soon to be; a bride! Fan-

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chon! Adrienne! Suzanne! I invite you all to my wedding!"

The little group was nearly paralysed with excitement and surprise.

"Destine! do you mean it?" they exclaimed in one breath.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now. As soon as I go to Confession."

At this moment Destine was summoned below by the Mother Superior.

She hastily started downstairs, but then suddenly turned back and impulsively, without a word, kissed them quickly, each one.

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Chapter XXX

A MASCOT AMAZED

BEFORE taking his place in the council chamber on the first day of his recovery after the attempted assassination, Louis glanced over an official statement of the Dauphin's acts during the three days of his authority.

His Majesty perused the paper at first indifferently but soon with decided interest as he noted some adjustment of affairs that indicated the Dauphin's thorough appreciation of this opportunity to do as he pleased. The King was inclined to be amused at this unlooked-for individuality displayed by his son.

"My successor has enjoyed his rehearsal!" he laconically remarked, but suddenly he stamped his foot.

"Send the Dauphin here at once. He shall be reminded that Louis XV. still reigns."

The gentlemen in attendance were exceedingly curious as to what special item on the list had so

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aroused the royal indignation, but Louis did not enlighten them, and to their chagrin, as soon as the Dauphin was announced, everyone else was dismissed.

Alone together, both father and son were for a moment silent; the Dauphin waiting for the King to speak.

He did not have to wait long. Louis, seated at the writing-table, the document in his hand, a frown on his brow and venom in his voice, launched forth in fury:

"Am I King of France? or merely a worm in the wall?"

The Dauphin bent forward deferentially, sweeping his hat to the floor, as he replied:

"I bow to the King."

"Then how did you dare cancel an order of mine?"

"To what order does your Majesty refer?"

"This infernal — hound of Hades, Count de Vrie!"

"With your Majesty's permission, I will explain."

"How did you know of that man's incarceration?"

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"I learned by accident."

"How did you know where he was?"

"I was told."

"How know he was alive?"

"That fact came along with the others —."

Louis' anger was such that he would not heed his son's answers.

"How, in Satan's name, did you dare to pardon this scoundrel?"

"Your Majesty gave me the power."

"It's a power you have much misused!"

"It grieves me to have given you this offence."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I found myself bound in all conscience to do as I did —."

"The Devil take your conscience! Tell me how, and when, and where you learned about this villain De Vrie?—sly and slippery as an eel!—Death can't catch him, and the King can't hold him!"

"It was in the woods near Meudon, where I chanced to be walking clad in the incognito of a Jesuit priest, when —."

"Damn the Jesuits!" Louis slapped the papers on the table. "I've had nothing but priests and

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prayers for the past three days! And now you begin, with your impertinent conscience! I will hear no more: we are wasting time. Send me Du Berryier at once."

Du Berryier was the Chief of Police. Du Berryier soon came, and Du Berryier soon went; with an order in his pocket to follow the Count de Vrie and recapture him, at any sacrifice of horses, men, or money.

Three hours later Louis, in the *petit* council chamber, was listening wearily to a speech from the Prime Minister.

The King was plainly out of sorts. He had been so all morning. It was not merely the scene with his son that had caused this; it was, in fact, the after-effect of his recent plunge into piety. In plain words, he was full of resentment toward the world in general, the Church in particular, and even Death itself for having hoodwinked him into dismissing Pompadour. Poor Pompadour! He supposed she had gone: he had not ventured yet to inquire.

Yes, Louis was plainly out of sorts, but the Prime Minister bravely continued his speech.

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The Secretaries were busily penning notes with their scratching quills. The Archbishop of Paris, while giving attention to the speaker, was at the same time engaged with his snuff-box, which he manipulated with pontifical grace. Other prelates and Ministers of State were grouped around the throne-chair, while as a background to these flowers of the realm were ranged noblemen of varied rank, who served the occasion as so much necessary but unimportant shrubbery.

Suddenly the door opened and Du Berryier was announced.

D'Argenson's speech fell to pieces. The Chief of Police, promptly admitted, was questioned by Louis eagerly:

"You have news?"

"Yes, your Majesty; the Count de Vrie has been captured."

"Good!" exclaimed Louis. Then, with a gesture of dismissal, the laconic order: "A la Bastille!"

"But, your Majesty, I must inform you further that the Count de Vrie is accompanied by — a woman."

"A woman!" Louis' face became livid. Like

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a flash he thought of Pompadour! She had joined De Vrie! This, then, was the way she took her dismissal!

Fury blazed in the royal eye; the hand that wore the signet ring was clenched in a passion of rage. Louis asked no questions; he commanded:

"Bring them into our Presence."

He would let the Pompadour feel, for once, the lash of a King's wrath! she should drain the cup of humiliation before the entire council!

Louis' jealous anger grew in force and stormed within him, as he weighed the Pompadour's perfidy.

A silence of fear and perplexity rested over the room, for the expression on his Majesty's face was such that a nation might tremble. He was leaning forward, his arm on the chair, his chin resting tensely upon his hand.

The door was reopened and the prisoners entered. The King did not look up at once.

Romain walked forward with a manner very much like that with which he had walked out when the lettre-de-cachet was given him.

Destine at his side, leaning upon his arm, was a picture most appealing; very pale, very pretty. Every eye was upon her.

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The King looked up slowly, his eyebrows heavy with hate. He gave a sudden start, leaned forward excitedly, looked again, then as though exhausted with amazement, he threw himself back, dropped his hands on his knees and exclaimed — sotto voce:

"Ye Gods! the Pompadour's protégée!"

A strange warmth and gladness mellowed the monarch's heart as he encountered this apparent proof of Pompadour's sincerity. He muttered to himself with satisfaction:

"So Madame, after all, has been true!"

You see, the Pompadour's mascot was doing good work, though quite unbeknown to the troubled trinity most concerned—Louis, Romain and the Marquise.

The mascot herself thought everything all amiss, and could hardly believe her own ears when, after a pause of perilous suspense, a voice from the throne addressed her with tones of utmost graciousness.

"We rejoice to see you, Mademoiselle."

Then Romain spoke promptly:

"Your Majesty's pardon; this lady is my wife."

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No words could have pleased Louis more. With a royal sweep of his hand, he announced:

"We welcome your Countess to Versailles. And, because you have shown such excellent taste in selecting a wife, you — De Vrie — we pardon."

History records how that same afternoon Louis, in royal state, called upon the Pompadour, that all the world might know he was glad she had remained at Versailles.

Ten years later when, through her influence, every Jesuit in France was driven out of the kingdom, some of Madame Pompadour's friends recalled the words she had uttered on that memorable day of her dismissal:

"We shall yet see who triumphs — les Jésuites or la Pompadour!"

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HISTORICAL NOTES

p. 1. Madame de Pompadour was born December 29, 1721.

p. 20. The convent of St. Cyr was founded by Madame de Maintenon.

p. 35. The Marquis de Livry was given his lettre de cachet in the manner here described, Louis requesting him not to be late to dinner.

p. 71. The incident of Louis ordering his Grand Falconer to find out if there were any open graves in the cemetery they chanced to pass is authentic.

p. 90. Monsieur de Marigny's name and title had been secured for him by Madame Pompadour's (his sister's) influence. She was always favouring her relatives.

p. 96. Voltaire at this period was spending most of his time at Sans Souci with Frederick the Great, but he had been, when in Paris, such an habitual guest of Madame Pompadour that a portrayal of her salon without him would hardly be complete in effect.

p. 130. The five heretical sentences claimed to be in Jansen's book are :

1. "There are divine commandments which good men, although willing, are unable to obey; and the grace by which these commandments are possible is also wanting.
2. "No one in the state of fallen nature is able to resist internal grace.
3. "In order to render human actions meritorious or otherwise liberty from necessity is not required; but only liberty from restraint.
4. "The Semi-Pelagians, while admitting the necessity of prevenient grace, or grace preceding all actions, were heretics, inasmuch as they said that this grace was such as man could, according to his will, either resist or obey.
5. "The Semi-Pelagians also erred in saying that Christ died or shed his blood for all men universally."

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It is probable that these sentences were originally presented by the Jesuits merely as an embodiment of the essential doctrines of Jansen's book, and with no idea of their being taken as verbatim.—See Nicolini's *History of the Jesuits*, p. 233.

p. 163. The Lit de justice was held December 13, 1756,—and had been suddenly decided upon by Louis only the day before.

p. 164. Almost the entire Parliament was exiled.—See *La Cour de Louis XV*, par Emile Campardon, p. 177. The King recalled the exiles six months later and Parliament resumed its function September 1, 1757.

p. 203. Madame Pompadour's elevation to the position of Lady-in-waiting to the Queen, in 1756, was a triumph of the first magnitude. Her sworn enemy — the haughty and severe Madame de Luynes — was obliged to go through the ceremony of presenting her in this new office to the Queen.

p. 220. Madame du Hausset, frankly and without apology, relates the advantages she derived from listening in this alcove. — See *Du Hausset-Memoires*.

p. 234. It seems incredible that merchants of any sort should have been proffering their wares in the corridors of Versailles, but Walpole vouches for this — as also for the draughtiness of the place.

p. 235. Memoirs of the time abundantly confirm the stories that Lebel was in the habit of smuggling young girls into Louis' private room.

p. 239. The attempted assassination occurred January 7, 1757, though some records make it January 5.

p. 242. This private stairway has since been walled up.

p. 247. Damiens was tortured to death by four horses, hitched to his limbs, pulling in different directions. A great multitude of people witnessed the horror.

p. 251. The dog, Mars, always slept under Louis' bed. — See *Memoires* — Comte Dufort.

p. 253. The Dauphin was in power for three days. — See *Campardon*, p. 192.

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HISTORICAL NOTES

p. 255. D'Argenson was the one at first commissioned to apprise Madame Pompadour of her dismissal, but he cleverly shifted the unpleasant task upon Machault.

p. 261. It was only by Madame de Mirapoix's timely advice that the Favourite saved herself from being turned out of Versailles. — See *La Cour de Louis XV* — Campardon, p. 194.

p. 262. While some writers have suggested that the Jesuits instigated the attack upon the King, the majority conclude that Damiens was merely an irresponsible person. All authorities agree that there was no possibility of killing the King with the weapon used.

p. 267. The Dauphin was much given to going about upon errands of mercy under the guise of a Jesuit priest.

p. 308. After taking her position in Versailles as Lady-in-waiting to the Queen, Madame Pompadour never returned to Bellevue. The Château was destroyed during the Commune; only the stable is left standing. The Marquise died of consumption at Versailles, April 15, 1764, aged 42.

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